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Volume 20, No. 2

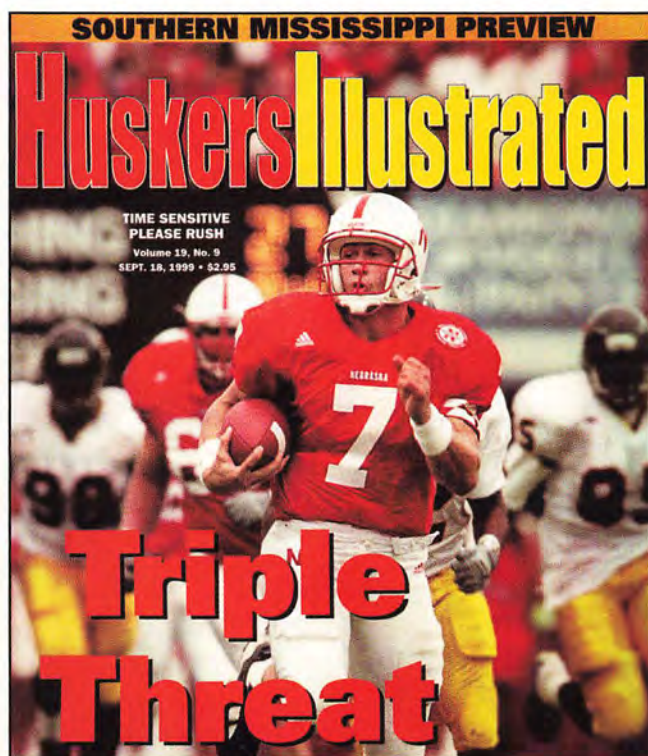
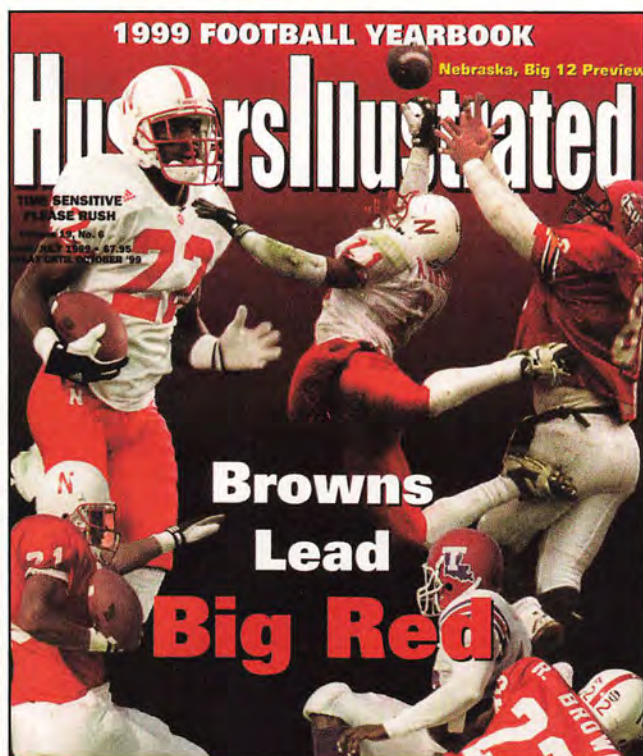
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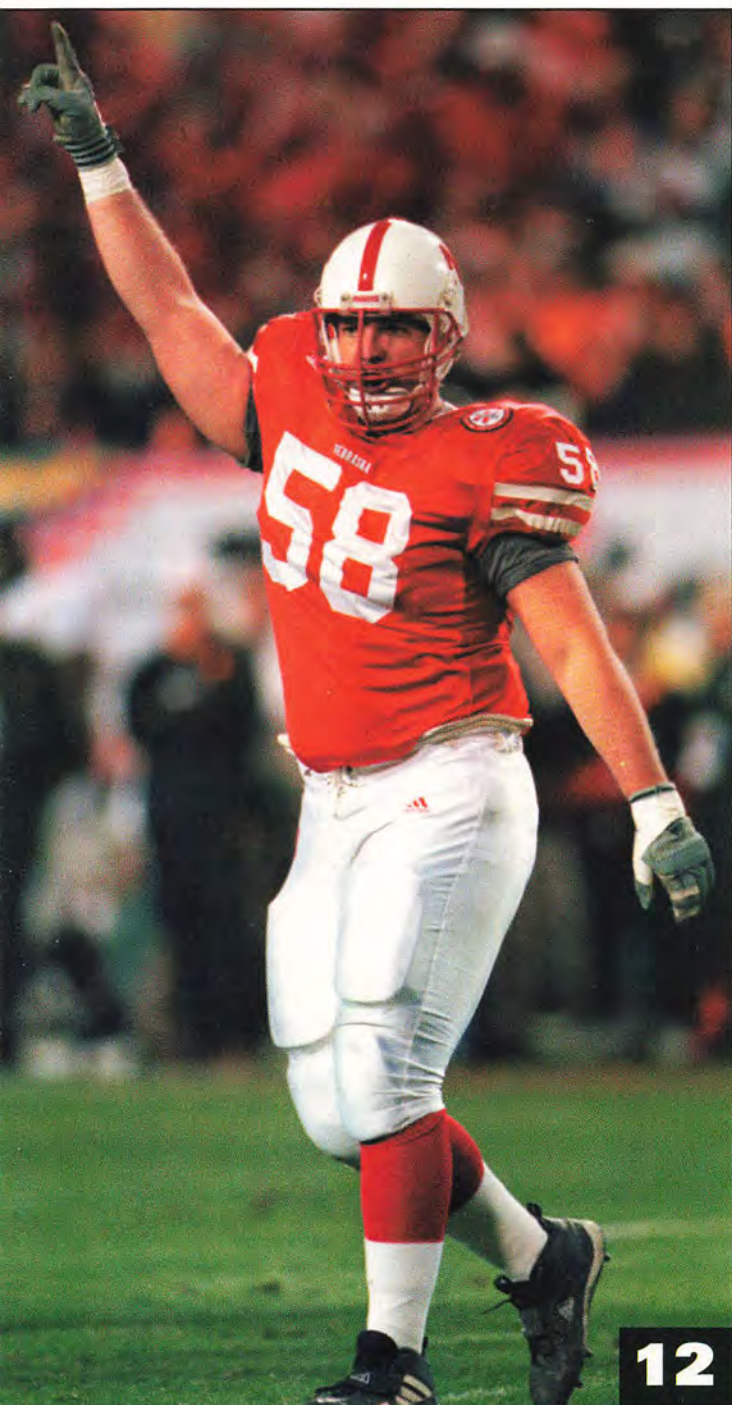


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20

20 Highs and Lows of 1999

Bobby Newcombe's punt return against Kansas was a turning point in the season. *By Mike Babcock*

ON THE COVER

Ralph Brown and Carlos Polk wrap up Tennessee receiver Cedrick Wilson. *Photo by Scott Bruhn*

Congratulations

Congratulations Huskers, on a great year. What a way to begin 2000. A special congratulations and thank you to Frank Solich for being named Big 12 Coach of the Year.

Congratulations to Charlie McBride and all of the seniors for one of the best defenses ever and to all of the coaches and all of the seniors on offense who have steadily improved all year.

A special congratulations to Coach Osborne for being named "Coach of The Decade." It was well-deserved.

Gene Peterson
Holiday Island, Ark.

Oklahomans Contribute

Congratulations to the Huskers and to Huskers Illustrated on another splendid season.

Being a displaced Nebraskan and still avid Husker fan, having resided for many years now in the great Sooner State, I was pleased to see Jason Lohr, about to apply some hurt on Major Applewhite, gracing the cover of your latest edition.

A few issues ago, you did an extensive story on Texans playing for Nebraska. It's time now for one on Oklahoma Huskers, since, during this past decade, Nebraska has plucked more than one gem from the state that was once home to its most hated rival. Such a list would include, of course, Will Shields, Mike Minter, Josh Heskew, and, presently, Jon Rutherford, Josh Brown, and Lohr, all of whom are likely to be starters next season.

Hopefully, despite the resurgence of the Sooners, Nebraska will continue to find success recruiting in this state, where great high school football tradition and talent abound, especially in places like Lohr's alma mater, Jenks, here in Tulsa, a perennial powerhouse and frequent member of USA Today's top 25 in the nation.

Don Marshall
Tulsa, Okla.

A Bunch of BCS

With almost all the teams in the Big East and ACC losing bowl games except when playing each other, it is time once again to cry foul about the BCS. I think it is quite obvious that Nebraska is the BEST team in the country and that the

BCS full point for each loss in the formula completely outweighs the weak schedule of both FSU and V-TECH. I would like to see the V-Tech strength of schedule now after the 30-point loss by BC, as well as FSU's — Clemson lost, Georgia Tech lost, Florida lost. The list of bowl losers goes on for V-Tech as well.

As I said last year, and I am on record as saying "Give Frank Time. You can't judge him by one year." He proved to me to be unflappable in the early season with the DeAngelo Evans situation and the tough decision of who to play at quarterback. I thank Bobby Newcombe for wanting what's best for the team instead of himself as one of the keys to our outstanding season. Bobby may not have as many yards or TDs as some on the team, but he is my MVP because of the two punt returns for TDs (the one against KU and of course the one in the Fiesta Bowl) and mainly his team is first instead of personal goals attitude.

Pat O'Connor
Post Falls, Idaho



Thanks for HI

I would like to thank the staff of Huskers Illustrated for the outstanding publication that you fine people put out every week.

Needless to say, I am a huge Nebraska football fan. Unfortunately, being from Southwestern Pennsylvania (near Pittsburgh), my coverage of the Huskers has been limited until I subscribed to Huskers Illustrated over one year ago. I truly enjoy the in-depth recap of games and the polished coverage of the following week's games.

In addition to the 1999 team, the staff did a great job reporting about past great teams and players that roamed the gridiron of Tom Osborne Stadium. It is fun to personally compare past teams to the 1999 team. I often wonder how this team would match up against the 1983, 1994, 1995 and 1997 teams.

God bless and go Huskers! The new millennium is all about Nebraska.

Loren Robert Weekley
Beallsville, Pa.

Got Something To Say?

Please send your comments and questions to: Letters, 3210 NW 3rd St., Lincoln, Neb. 68521. You can also fax them to us at (402) 474-5132. We reserve the right to edit the letters for clarity, content and length. For those with electronic mail abilities, Hleditor@aol.com.

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'You Play With Your Heart'

**Injury-plagued Julch
ready to start life
beyond athletics**

Adam Julch has spent half an hour just getting out of bed in the morning this football season. His legs and back have ached.

"I'm 20-years-old in a 70-year-old body," he said recently.

"My back and legs, I just have a dull pain, constantly. If you've ever had disk problems, you'd understand. That's where the most pain is. A lot of people have been saying I go through all this pain. But, I mean, it's something I've learned to deal with. It's kind of a dull pain.

"It's not like somebody's biting you. It's not a sharp pain."

His physical ailments were such that Nebraska's senior offensive tackle and co-captain could have called it quits long before the Fiesta Bowl and no one would have questioned his resolve.

The pain and frustration of playing at less than 100 percent have been constant companions. He has suffered from back spasms associated with ruptured disks, a problem for which he underwent surgery when he was a freshman,



Co-Captain Adam Julch started every game in 1999.

and from a left elbow dislocated during two-a-day practices in the fall.

There also have been the lingering effects of a right ankle dislocated in the spring.

"But you think about it, and you deal with what God gives you," said Julch.

"I've never thought about quitting. There's a point where common sense comes into play. But when you love this game so much, you don't want to let your teammates down.

"And then common

sense goes by the wayside. You play with your heart."

Occasionally, heart wasn't sufficient to keep him on the field, however.

"Sometimes, I've had to take myself out," Julch said. "The Kansas game, I took myself out and said: 'I can't do it anymore.' It's been a trying experience this year.

"I've tried to take it day-by-day and do what I can."

What he has done is start every game. All five interior linemen have.

The other four — James Sherman, Russ Hochstein, Dominic Raiola and Dave Volk — have helped to keep him going. They're "like my brothers," said Julch. "I'm playing for them."

Because of what he has endured, Julch was a hands-down choice to receive the Tom Novak Award, which is presented annually to the Cornhusker senior who "best exemplifies courage and determination despite all odds in the manner of Nebraska All-American center Tom Novak."

Writing Julch's name first on the media ballot was a no-brainer.

He has finished his career with no regrets. "I've enjoyed every minute I've played," he said. "I know I'm not the best player in the world. But I try my heart out and do the best I can."

He also has done his best in the classroom, preparing

for when his playing career is over. He is a three-time academic all-conference honoree, majoring in economics and mathematics.

He received a bachelor's degree in December and is beginning graduate school at Nebraska in the spring semester. His goal is a master's degree in business administration.

"I'm excited to get started in my life beyond athletics," he said.

"I'm kind of excited to just be a regular student. I think I need a break from sports."

Even so, "it will be very hard," he said. "I've been playing (football) since I was in the fourth grade. It's been my life. I love sports. I've always been a part of organized sports.

"I don't know what I'll do with myself. Being a normal student will be interesting."

The majority of his fellow seniors will find themselves in a similar situation. Only a handful will have an opportunity to continue playing football at the professional level.

"I love this program, everything it has done for me," said Julch.

There hasn't been much positive about the physical ailments, of course.

But it has given him insight into the aging process. "I know how my grandpa feels," he said. ■

NEBRASKA'S RUSHING ATTACK SHOULD HAVE ADDED THUNDER IN SPRING PRACTICE

Barring something unforeseen, Thunder Collins should be enrolled and attending second-semester classes at Nebraska. The running back from East Los Angeles College signed a letter of intent with the Cornhuskers in mid-December and was scheduled to fly to Lincoln in early January.

He will be able to go through spring practice and be able to play in the fall after redshirting and taking junior college classes during first semester. He will have three seasons of eligibility.

Even though Collins technically is a member of the recruiting class that will be announced in February, he will officially count against the 1999 class scholarship total.

Collins, a running back, rushed for 1,500 yards and 23 touchdowns as a freshman.

He will be Nebraska's first "Thunder" since the early 1960s, when Bill Thornton played fullback for Coach Bob Devaney's first team. Thornton was known by his nickname, "Thunder."

NEBRASKA'S GREATEST

The Nebraska football program was well represented on Sports Illustrated's list of the century's "50 Greatest Sports Figures From Nebraska."

The list, published in the magazine's year-end issue, included 13 former Cornhuskers, among them Coach Tom Osborne and Johnny Rodgers in the top five.

The others on the list were, in order: Ed Weir, Dave Rimington, Pat Fischer, Mick Tingelhoff, George Sauer, Charley Brock, Dean Steinkuhler, Guy Chamberlin, Glenn Presnell, Tom Rathman and Kent McCloughan. All 13 are native Nebraskans, although that wasn't a requirement.

The magazine picked 50 sports figures from each state, based on "where they first showed flashes of the greatness to come."

Several Nebraska football players were included on the lists of the states in which they attended high school, among them: Irving Fryar and Mike Rozier, New Jersey; John Dutton and Larry Jacobson, South Dakota; Roger Craig, Iowa; Darin Erstad, North Dakota; David Humm, Nevada; and "Link" Lyman, Kansas. Current Cornhusker Bobby Newcombe was included on New Mexico's list.

As with any such listing, some that were deserving of recognition were left off. And there were glaring Nebraska football-related omissions, including Bob Devaney (Michigan), Tommie Frazier (Florida), Trev Alberts (Iowa), Rich Glover (New Jersey) and Sam Francis (Kansas).

A good case for Scott Frost's inclusion also could have been made, as could a case for Elmer Dohrmann, the university's top all-time varsity letterwinner.

Frost's mom, Carole, was included on the Nebraska list. She was a "four-time national AAU discus champion" and "won a gold medal at the 1968 Pan Am Games," the magazine notes.

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

CLUB HONORS SOLICH AS COACH OF THE YEAR

Frank Solich was named college football coach of the year by the Downtown Athletic Club of Glenwood, Iowa, and will receive the club's Tom Osborne Trophy.

The club has been honoring a coach of the year since 1994, when Osborne was the first recipient. The other winners have been Northwestern's Gary Barnett (1995), Arizona State's Bruce Snyder (1996), Missouri's Larry Smith (1997) and Kansas State's Bill Snyder (1998).

The trophy was named in honor of Osborne following his retirement. The award-winner is determined by a vote of 250 college football fans from 16 states and three countries, the United States, Russia and Australia.

JULCH, BROWN, SHAW EARN SENIOR AWARDS

Senior football players Adam Julch, Mike Brown and Brian Shaw were to receive awards at the annual Outland Trophy banquet in Omaha in mid-January.

Julch was to receive the Tom Novak Trophy, Brown the Guy Chamberlin Trophy and Shaw the Cletus Fischer Native Son Award.

NEWSPAPER POLL CHOOSES RODGERS

Johnny Rodgers, the Heisman Trophy winner in 1972, was chosen as the outstanding Cornhusker football player of the century in a vote of readers of the Lincoln Journal Star.

"I guess fans don't want to let me go," Rodgers told the newspaper. "I think I represent something more than just me when people pick me for something like this."

The Journal Star received more than 1,200 ballots. In addition to Rodgers, the top five included, in order: Tommie Frazier, Mike Rozier, Tom Novak and Bobby Reynolds.

BASEBALL RECRUITS INCLUDE SIX JUNIOR COLLEGE TRANSFERS

Cornhusker baseball coach Dave Van Horn announced the signing of 13 recruits, including six junior college transfers and seven high school players, in mid-December.

The transfers include infielder Jeff Blevins, Texarkana Community College; infielder Brandon Eymann, Lassen, Calif., Community College; infielder Willie Jones, Colby, Kan., Community College; infielder Miles Luuioa, Laney, Calif., Junior College; catch Jed Morris, Tyler, Texas, Junior College; and first baseman-outfielder Justin Seely, Northeast Texas Community College.

The high school recruits include outfielder Drew Anderson, Kearney, Neb.; right-handed pitcher Jason Burch, Papillion, Neb.; outfielder Matt Daeges, Harlan, Iowa; right-handed pitcher Joel Hanrahan, Norwalk, Iowa; infielder Vic Martinez, Westminster, Colo.; right-handed pitcher Mike Sillman, Omaha, Neb., and right-handed pitcher Dusty Timm, Yutan, Neb.

LINEBACKER COLEMAN READY TO GO; RUSH END OWEN GOES HOME

True freshman Shaun Coleman, a linebacker from Littleton, Colo., is on scholarship now and attending classes full-time after being a part-time student first semester.

Coleman sat out the fall because of injury.

Spencer Owen, another freshmen in the Nebraska football team's 1999 recruiting class, has left the university and returned home to Carrollton, Mo., to farm. The highly regarded Owen was a rush end.

His surprise departure had nothing to do with football or school, Coach Frank Solich told the Lincoln Journal Star. "It had more to do with what he wants to do with the rest of his life," Solich said.

Larry Henderson, another 1999 recruit, also didn't finish the season. The transfer from West Los Angeles Community College, left the team after the final home game.

Henderson's decision was based on problems associated with injuries, according to Solich. The wide receiver and kick returner had only one season of eligibility at Nebraska.

OH, BROTHER

Former Cornhusker Grant Wistrom managed to keep up with his brother Tracey, Nebraska's sophomore tight end, in scoring touchdowns. Tracey caught two touchdown passes during the regular season, and Grant scored his second touchdown of the season on a 41-yard interception return against the Chicago Bears in the next-to-last game of the St. Louis Rams' regular season.

Grant also had a 40-yard fumble return in the game but lost the ball to the Bears' Bobby Engram. ■

Team Of The '90s: Nebraska or Florida State?

*Huskers have more titles,
Seminoles have consistent top-four finishes*



**Brian
HILL**

AS A FAN of the Atlanta Braves (and not just since it became fashionable), I'd like to say the Braves are the "team of the '90s." But they're not. If there is such a thing, in baseball, it's the New York Yankees.

In college football, the distinction is not nearly so clear.

On the one hand, you have Nebraska, which won three national championships and finished the decade 108-16-1.

Then you have Florida State, which just won its second title in the decade and recorded a record of 109-13-1.

The only head-to-head meetings occurred exactly one year apart. The Seminoles defeated the Huskers 27-14 in the Jan. 1, 1993, Orange Bowl. A year later in Miami, a 45-yard field goal attempt sail wide left on the game's final play as FSU held on to win 18-16.

Florida State fans might also point to the fact that their team finished in the top four in at least one of the major polls each year in the decade. Nebraska finished among the

top four in five of the 10 years.

Were it not for a pair of fumbles deep in Texas territory in the regular-season meeting or maybe even the near collapse in the second half at Colorado, the Huskers would have had the chance to settle any dispute on the field.

Maybe it'll happen next year. A story by David Teel of the Newport News (Va.) Daily Press projected Nebraska No. 1 and Florida State No. 2 for the 2000 season.

It's still only January, but the Huskers' performance in the Fiesta Bowl and the wealth of talent returning has the fans as well as the media already looking ahead.

You can relive Nebraska's impressive victory over defending national champion Tennessee, including the classic 99- and 96-yard scoring drives in the second half that took the fight out of the Volunteers.

Contributing editor Mike Babcock also takes a look at the highs and lows of the 1999 season. Readers are always looking ahead, so we list the schedules through 2003 on Page 19.

Stay tuned for the March issue. It's (almost) all about recruiting. ■

Feb. 2 is Signing Day.

**Watch for the special Recruiting Wrap-up
(photos, capsules, coaches' comments)
in the March issue (available Feb. 17)**

March 1999 Cover



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Program Took Precedence Over Coach's Feelings

Pettit's decision to retire reflects selflessness rarely seen in profession dependent on ego



**Mike
BABCOCK**

TERRY PETTIT DESCRIBED the day on which he officially announced he was stepping aside after 23 seasons as Nebraska's head volleyball coach as one to celebrate.

"I think today is a great day for Nebraska volleyball," he said.

"And I really believe that.

Those of us with less vision than Pettit might question his sincerity. But his concern for the Husker volleyball program is obviously greater than his need to continue

coaching in it.

He is convinced the program will thrive under the direction of John Cook. And he is willing to allow Cook a unique opportunity, even though he is in his coaching prime.

Pettit's decision to retire from coaching at age 53 reflects a selflessness rarely seen in a profession so dependent on ego. (Tom Osborne displayed that same quality.)

During a news conference to announce his decision, Pettit downplayed his contributions, choosing instead to emphasize the progress of the program, and of women's athletics in general.

"We have a university and an athletic administration that is committed not to just Nebraska volleyball but to opportunity for women," said Pettit. "Nebraska was one of the first universities to provide that opportunity, but it has certainly gotten better the longer we've been at it.

"And the fact that we have not just a Lincoln community but a Nebraska community that is interested in the development of these women, and follows them, shows just how far we've come."

Volleyball has been Nebraska's showcase women's sport from Pettit's first season as coach, shaping attitudes towards women's athletics not only at the university but also in the surrounding community and in the state. And that influence transcends the program's extraordinary success.

Even he couldn't have imagined where the program would go when he arrived from Louisburg, N.C., Junior College in 1977, nor could he imagine that he would lead it there.

"I envisioned maybe doing this for three or four years and then teaching English or writing or something like that," said Pettit, who has a master of fine arts degree in creative writing.

"What pleases me the most is when we began this adventure with women's athletics 25 years ago, it wasn't popular. It wasn't popular at the University of Nebraska. It wasn't popular with the people.

"The average person on the street, if you would have said do women deserve the opportunity to compete, they would have said no. And I'm talking about bright, knowledgeable people.

"So Title IX did something. And we were fortunate to be

at a university that had the resources to jump into that. What's been fun to see is, I think no one (now) really doesn't have an appreciation that all people deserve the opportunity to have the competitive experience. The fact that people have learned to be entertained by it is kind of gravy. But the most important thing is the opportunity."

Pettit's record at Nebraska was 694-148-11 (.820), with a national championship in 1995. His teams won 21 conference championships and played in 18 consecutive NCAA Tournaments.

In recent seasons, the Huskers have played to capacity crowds and ranked among the nation's best in home attendance. "I appreciate what I perceive as the affection the Nebraska community has for the volleyball team," Pettit said. "And certainly some of that has to do with success.

"But I think a lot of it has to do with the type of people we have in the program. I think there are certain values that have been carried out, how our players have competed, how they respect their opponent, how they handle winning, how they take on other more important issues once they graduate."

The measure of the program is not in victories, of which there have been so many, but rather in the character of the student-athletes who have represented the university and the state so well.

When he met with the team the day before making his announcement, Pettit told his players "I really believe in the long run the most important thing is not whether you are an All-American, not whether your team won the conference or went to the Final Four, but in my eyes, the most important thing is, you played four years of Nebraska volleyball. I think that

sets those people apart," he said.

He controlled his emotions as he spoke for the last time as the Huskers' coach.

"I grieved," he said. "I don't think there's any way you make a decision like this, when Nebraska volleyball has been such a major part of your life, and (not). I did that. But I did it quietly."

And he did it in a way that wouldn't affect the season.

To the end, the program took precedence over his feelings. Even so, he made one request of Cook. "Emma gets to come in the gym," Pettit said, referring to the younger of his daughters.

"If I have something that I'm remorseful about, and I talk with John about this, it is that Emma won't have the opportunity to bounce around in the gym with those people."

Katherine, his older daughter, grew up with the program. And "I think Katherine's character and Katherine's success, a lot of it, were shaped by being around remarkable women," he said.

That's what the program has meant, and will continue to mean. ■



**Terry Pettit's teams
played in 18 straight
NCAA Tournaments.**

Long Drives Vintage Nebraska

*When Tennessee threatened,
Huskers turned on the power*



**Bob
SCHALLER**

THIS IS WHAT teams with great character do.

They push when you think they have no choice but to pull. They swing when it appears you have their back against the ropes. You think they must go left, but they go right — or up the middle.

Really, you just don't know.

This is why Nebraska is officially the unofficial national champion after Florida

State cleaned Virginia Tech's clock: Because no team can beat the heck of the defending national champions defensively, and then drive 96 and 99 yards on back-to-back possessions — no team except Nebraska.

And this wasn't against some patsy like a Virginia Tech opponent. This was against defending national champion Tennessee, which came within four points of being undefeated BEFORE facing Nebraska — for those of you without a calculator, Tennessee is now 14 points and one football time zone away from a perfect season.

Twice after punts where Nebraska backs lined up in the end zone. Twice, the offensive line said "COMING THROUGH!" and beat the tar out of the Volunteers, which, as a mascot takes on a whole new meaning after getting pounded by the Big Red.

"I think definitely that was a turning point in the game," quarterback Eric Crouch said. "It was definitely motivating for our offense. That first drive . . . it showed a lot of stamina, a lot of heart of the linemen and running backs — pretty much everybody on the field."

The 99-yarder was as much a product of the first drive and the momentum that came from the long march.

"I think it had a lot to do with the sideline emotions, too," Crouch said. "Everybody was into it, helping one another out. After we scored that (96-yard drive) touchdown, we just told ourselves, 'Hey, we're going to have to do it again. This time it's going to have to be 99 yards.' We told ourselves we could do it — really, we did it already. We just went down and scored a touchdown. It was a great feeling knowing that we could do that. You don't see that a lot."

Tennessee Coach Phil Fulmer agreed.

"Not that I can remember, no — I'm sure somebody has taken it 99 yards, but maybe not like that," Fulmer said. "Very impressive drive, both of them were."

NU split end Matt Davison said that was the end of the game, right there.

"That's where the tide changed," Davison said. "Up until then — especially right after they scored — it looked they

had it going. But those two drives killed it, and the tide came our way."

"Yeah . . . the two drives," NU Coach Frank Solich said. "Well, one we started on the 4, and the other one on the 1."

And???

"Well, when you're caught in that kind of situation and you're running our offense, it really limits you because you're a little nervous about running the play-action pass," Solich said, "you're a little nervous about the option game in your own territory."

So????

"So," Solich continued, "you start off with the power game."

Since I was on the field, I wasn't able to see the TV coverage. But what they should've done was used those words that the old Batman show did when Batman was pummeling a foe.

First down from the 4 . . . BAM!!

First down from the 12 . . . POW!!

"We were able to bust a couple of plays very well on the first drive," Solich said. "We got that first down . . . that was big."

Touchdown.

First down from the 1 . . . KABOOM!!

First down from the 34 . . . SLAM!!

"Then, on the second one . . . of course we were able to mix in nothing but runs, really the rest of the time," Solich said.

Touchdown. Erase any comeback hopes Tennessee had harbored. Erase any HOPE the Vols had. Physical. Smash-mouth. Pick a word, any word that involves pounding. Look at the Tennessee players after the game — a nice group of kids, but the stains on their uniforms, the disdain in their voices and the pained look indicated maybe they really hadn't learned so much from Nebraska in 1997 that they were able to close the gap.

Offensive guard Russ Hochstein said he and his linemates were proud of the 321-yard rushing performance.

"We take a lot of pride in that," Hochstein said. "We wanted to run it all night. It seemed like every time we ran it, we got five yards (actually averaged 6.6 per rush). So it was like, 'OK, let's do it again.'"

Too much offense. Too much defense. Too much Nebraska. You really want to tug on Superman's cape?

Go ahead. But you'd better have a hell of a grip.

The line loses senior tackle Adam Julch and guard James Sherman. They will likely be replaced by Jon Rutherford and Toniui Fonoti, respectively.

"We'll be fine next year," Hochstein said with a smile. "Trust me." ■



Quarterback Eric Crouch said the long drives showed a lot of stamina and heart.

Bob Schaller covers the Huskers for the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. He has also written several books, including "Touchdown Tommie" and "Roar of Silence: The Kenny Walker Story." Bob can be reached at schallerrc@aol.com.

Frankly, Nebraska Is Getting A Bargain

In his second season, Solich shows why he was Osborne's hand-picked replacement



Curt McKEEVER

of that result.

It was the Gators' third straight loss — their first such skid since 1988 — in a 9-4 season, which meant they were going to finish outside the top 10. And here was Spurrier, one of the most intense coaches in the game, shrugging his shoulders and with a philosophical message of "life goes on."

I suppose \$2 million a year and a few tee times can do wonders in the aftermath of a frustrating season.

Which brings me to Solich, who I remembered looking like he'd just gotten off one of those gravity-defying amusement park rides after NU went 9-4 last season.

As we're quickly finding out, there's a big reason why this guy was hand-picked by one of the greatest coaches ever to be his replacement. And it's not just because he's been loyal.

Frank Solich is one tough coach. He can match wits with the best minds in the game (just ask Bill Snyder), and he knows how to motivate his players while keeping egos in check.

At a base salary of \$225,000 per year, Solich makes a nice living. But it's time for the Nebraska brass to do more than realize they're getting a dime-store bargain. It's time to up the ante, significantly, and pay their coach like he's in charge of one of the nation's elite programs.

Like Florida does with Spurrier. Like Tennessee does with Phillip Fulmer. Like LSU — that's right, LSU — does with Nick Saban.

It shouldn't matter that securing a large financial contract isn't a high priority for Solich. Of course, considering that his mentor had almost no concern about keeping up with the Joneses, that's not surprising, either.

But football at Nebraska generates more money than all but a handful of programs across the country, and hiking Solich's pay should be viewed as a wise investment toward keeping business booming.

We all know the Huskers have — or could easily raise — the money.

We think Nebraska will always be good in football just

CHANNEL SURFING for college football highlights the night before Nebraska hammered Tennessee in the Fiesta Bowl left me chuckling at Florida's Steve Spurrier — and thinking of Frank Solich and what the school needs to do for its second-year coach.

Spurrier's team had just lost to Michigan State in the Citrus Bowl, and he was explaining, rather calmly, the implications

because it's Nebraska football. Just remember that the folks in Norman, Okla., used to think that about the Sooners, too. OK, so NCAA probation was the start of OU's troubles. But poor coaching had a bigger impact on the fall of that once-mighty empire.

At Nebraska, Solich is 21-5, which represents the third-best record by any NCAA Division I-A coach after two seasons.

Solich might be a Cornhusker through and through, and at age 53 he probably doesn't spend any time thinking about packing his bags. But you can bet that his accomplishments will catch the eye of someone after a big-time catch.

And, if Nebraska takes him for granted, you can also bet that person will come knocking in the middle of the night to try and whisk Solich away.

If not now, then perhaps following next season, when Nebraska should continue down the same path as 1999 and be right in the thick of the national championship race.

"I think next year is going to be one where people are saying, 'Look out for Nebraska,'" offensive guard Russ Hochstein said.

At worst, NU ought to start out No. 2 in the preseason.

An offense that in four of the final six games rushed for at least 300 yards against defenses that ranked in the top 25 nationally against the run will return almost intact.

The skill-position players who will be back accounted for 96.2 percent of the rushing yardage and 92.7 percent of the points this season.

The defense will be under the direction of a new coordinator, but Craig Bohl brings the same kind of fire as Charlie McBride, and he'll have five returning starters along with a two-year starter who sat out healing up this year (Erwin Swiney) to build around.

Listen to Solich talk about the possibilities of 2000, and it's clear he's comfortable with whatever lofty position people want to place his team.

As as he left the Sun Devil Stadium field following Nebraska's latest victory, the smile Solich wore would have made one think he'd just tasted his first national championship.

He should be paid as if his first one is just around the corner. ■



Frank Solich has a 21-5 record after two years as head coach.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.



There was a lot to celebrate, as Mike Brown (21) congratulates Kyle Vanden Bosch (above) after a sack of Tennessee quarterback Tee Martin. The Huskers took an early 14-0 lead on a 60-yard punt return by Bobby Newcombe (above right).



GAME RECAP

**Story by Mike Babcock
Photos by Scott Bruhn**

Driving Through Tennessee

*Huskers use drives of
99, 96 yards to take
command in 31-21
Fiesta Bowl victory*

Phillip Fulmer spoke with respect for Nebraska following the Cornhuskers' 31-21 victory against Tennessee in the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl game on the second day of the 21st Century.

At some point during his eight seasons as head football coach at Tennessee an opponent might have driven 99 yards against the Volunteers. "But not like that," said Fulmer.

Nebraska covered the 99 yards with 10 plays, all runs, divided among four players: quarterback Eric Crouch, fullback Willie

Miller and I-backs Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter.

The Cornhuskers never faced a third down, and used up 4:15 on the game clock.

Despite trailing by only 10 points at the time, Tennessee didn't take a timeout in an attempt to slow Nebraska's relentless drive down the field at Sun Devil Stadium.

It was as if the Volunteers had accepted their fate.

"I think we wore them down a lot," Cornhusker offensive tackle Adam Julch said. "Their defense was getting tired, and we hurt a few of them. That's the way it is in some bowl games.

"Some people don't condition well enough."

In this case, there might not have been anything Tennessee could have done to condition itself for the onslaught. Despite the claims of some Volunteers prior to the game that Nebraska's reputation for being physical was a "myth and folklore," the evidence didn't seem to support that.

Such words rang hollow as Tennessee defenders were helped from the field.

The drive, capped by a Buckhalter touchdown from 2 yards out, eliminated any doubt about the game's outcome, coming after a nine-play, 96-yard drive on Nebraska's previous possession. "If a team can take it 99 and 96 yards on you, obviously they're something special," Fulmer said.

And so the Cornhuskers were. Even though they had no hope of being voted national champions, "as far as I'm concerned, they are No. 1," said Nebraska defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

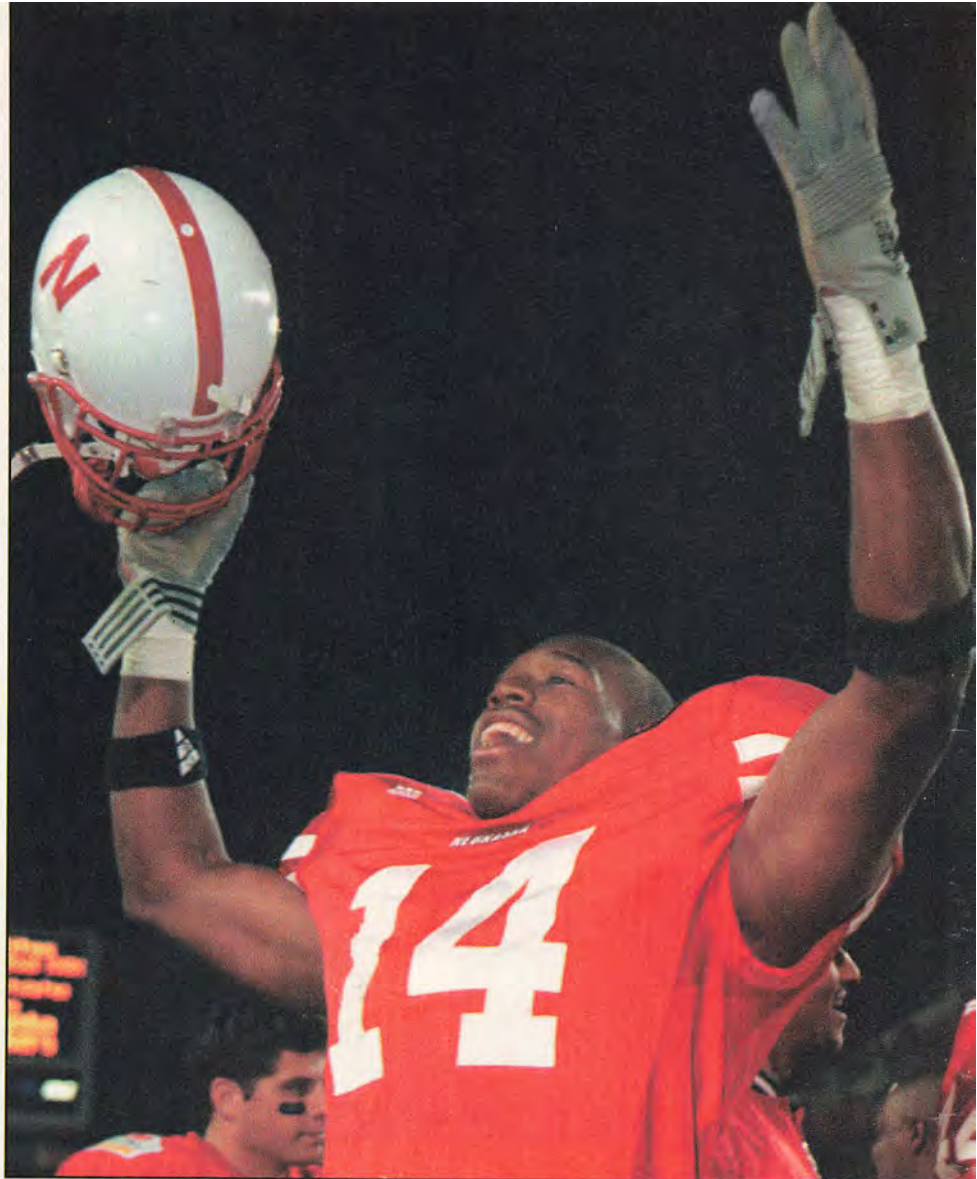
"There's no question about it. I don't have any hesitation in my mind."

McBride tried to fight back tears as he spoke from the podium in an interview tent set up just outside the stadium. "Anybody that wanted to step up against us, we could win," he said.

A few sentences earlier, McBride acknowledged that he was stepping aside after 24 years as a Nebraska assistant, the last 18 as defensive coordinator and defensive line coach.

Some players had already told reporters the game was his last.

The plan had been to hold the announcement until after the team returned to Lincoln. But "I guess it's pretty obvious," McBride said, halt-



Free safety Dion Booker leads the cheers. Booker and cornerback Ralph Brown each finished with eight tackles to lead the Huskers.

ingly. "I'm going to pull the plug."

McBride had wanted to wait because "it's not his style to tell people that he's retiring so they play for him," senior rover and co-captain Mike Brown said. "He just went about it quietly.

"Some of us knew before, not many. I talked to the guys before the game because I was probably one of only like maybe five people that really knew what was going to happen."

Brown was credited with seven tackles and intercepted a pass as the Cornhuskers contained a Tennessee offense that had averaged 406.2 yards and 31.6 points per game.

The Volunteers managed 311 yards, but a net of only 44 rushing.

After a 42-17 loss against Nebraska in the 1998 Orange Bowl game, Tennessee began placing more emphasis on the run. But "tonight was not a good example (of that)," Fulmer said.

What offense the Volunteers could muster came through the air. Quarterback Tee Martin completed 19-of-34 passes for 223 yards and his team's first touchdown, with two interceptions, and wide receiver Cedrick Wilson passed to Donte' Stallworth for Tennessee's last score. Travis Henry scored the Volunteers' other touchdown on a 4-yard run, to cap a four-play, 25-yard sequence to cut the score to 17-14 less than two minutes into the second half.

Tennessee recovered an Alexander fumble on the first play of the half to create what little suspense the game provided a sellout crowd of 71,526, on an unusually cool desert night.

The Volunteers didn't get on the scoreboard until just before halftime, after Nebraska had built a 17-0 lead on Alexander's 7-yard touchdown run to finish off a four-play, 43-yard series, a 60-yard punt return for a



Fullback Willie Miller breaks loose on a 47-yard burst to the Tennessee 13 in the third quarter. Eric Crouch hit tight end Aaron Golliday with a touchdown pass on the next play to give Nebraska a 24-14 lead.

touchdown by Bobby Newcombe and a 31-yard field goal by Josh Brown.

"At the end of the first half, we lost the momentum," Coach Frank Solich said the next morning. "At the beginning of the second half, they had the momentum, and we weren't able to get anything done on a couple of attempted drives. It didn't look good at that point in time.

"I think there are a lot of teams that would have never responded and would have overcome that against a team like Tennessee. That's what I think makes this team great."

The Cornhuskers came back against Tennessee as they had come back against Kansas, in a game Solich called the turning point in the season. "They did it against Kansas when their backs were against the wall, and they did it last night when their backs were against the wall," he said.

"Tennessee had everything going its way at the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half. Some teams would have caved in. But I had no fear that was going to happen with our team. I knew they would come back and eventually try

to get things going their way again."

Nebraska was limited to 83 net rushing yards in the first half, well off its pace for the season but nearly as many as Tennessee had been allowing, on the average, per game.

The Volunteers ranked seventh in the nation in rushing defense (89.6).

There was no panic in the Nebraska locker room, however. "We don't really say much at half-time," said Julch. "We know what we've got to do. They just told us to go out and be physical."

And that's what the Cornhuskers did. They were sluggish on their first possession following Alexander's fumble, picking up just one first down before punting.

But their next possession was vintage Nebraska.

Alexander carried four consecutive times. Crouch kept, then after a penalty for an illegal block, he completed passes to Newcombe and tight end Jon Bowling, for 17 yards on third-and-13.

That was the only third down the Cornhuskers would face in the two 90-yard drives.

Miller went off right guard for 47 yards, and then Crouch tossed to

tight end Aaron Golliday on a play-action pass good for 13 yards and the touchdown that gave Nebraska breathing room.

Three-and-a-half minutes later, the Cornhuskers had the ball again, at their own 1-yard line.

They took their cue from the previous drive, which "showed a lot of stamina, a lot of heart out of those linemen, running backs, pretty much everybody on the field," Crouch said.

"Everybody was into it, helping one another out. We just told ourselves: 'Hey, we're going to have to do it again. This time it's going to have to be 98, 99 yards.' We told ourselves we could do it. We had done it already. It was a great feeling knowing that we could do that."

Nebraska finished with 321 rushing yards, with Alexander gaining 108 and Miller 87.

The most any TEAM had managed against the Volunteers was 144 rushing yards.

Tennessee won the national championship last season, with help from the lessons it learned in the 1998 Orange Bowl game. "We got another lesson tonight," said Fulmer. ■

GOODBYE CHARLIE

Although he never wore a Blackshirt during his playing days, Nebraska's new defensive coordinator Bohl understands the tradition

Craig Bohl never got to wear a black practice jersey during his career as a walk-on defensive back at Nebraska. But he understands and respects the Blackshirt tradition.

"One of the neatest experiences I can remember as a player was being in the locker room and the coach coming in and having all those (black) shirts in a box, pulling them out and throwing them to different guys," Bohl has said. "It sent chills up and down my spine."

"That same admiration I had for those players who wore Blackshirts when I was a player here, I have for

the players I coach now. It makes Nebraska football really special."

That attitude will serve Bohl well in his new position as the Cornhuskers' defensive coordinator. Bohl, the linebackers coach the past five seasons, has succeeded Charlie McBride, who announced his retirement after 23 years as a Nebraska assistant following the Fiesta Bowl game.

Coach Frank Solich told a handful of reporters of the promotion the morning after the game, before the team left the Phoenix area to return to Lincoln. "I'm humbled," Bohl said

"I recognize this game is about teamwork. The thing that has been unique about Nebraska is the attitude of the coaches. Anything individual, I don't think is a major deal."

"But I do think we're going to have to work extremely hard to replace a great coach."

Bohl has the qualifications, according to McBride. "I think it's great," he said. "Craig is a Nebraska person. I think that adds a little to it because I wasn't. I was kind of an outsider."

"It just has a better feel because he knows the state. He knows the people



Charlie McBride gives his wife, Debbie, a kiss as he walks off the field after coaching his final game. McBride was a Nebraska assistant for 23 years, the last 18 as defensive coordinator.



Linebackers coach Craig Bohl, who played for the Huskers from 1977-79, is the new defensive coordinator.

in it."

Bohl also "has an outstanding knowledge of the game," said McBride.

Bohl was a Nebraska graduate assistant from 1981 to 1983 before beginning a coaching sojourn that included stops at North Dakota State, Tulsa, Wisconsin, Rice and Duke.

He spent six seasons as defensive coordinator for Coach Fred Goldsmith. They were together at Rice for five seasons and then at Duke, where they produced a dramatic turnaround in 1994.

Bohl returned to Nebraska in 1995, replacing Kevin Steele as linebackers coach.

Bohl will continue coaching the linebackers, with Solich's planning to hire a replacement for McBride as defensive line coach. Bohl has "a lot of experience with the job," Solich said.

"He's a very dedicated guy, puts in a great amount of work. I think he has developed a good relationship with the players, and above all, I think that's maybe as important as anything."

That and his insight into the Blackshirt tradition.

"One thing that Charlie wants us to do is continue the tradition of the Blackshirts," Bohl said. "I recognize that is a big responsibility, and a tremendous opportunity." ■

4TH & 1NCHES

Notes And Quotes From The Fiesta Bowl Game

PLAN CALLED FOR NEWCOMBE TO SEE ACTION AT I-BACK

Wingback Bobby Newcombe was set to see action at I-back against the Volunteers. "We had it planned to where he could have gotten a lot of reps (repetitions) at I-back," Coach Frank Solich said. "That did not materialize. But it was in play, and I felt he would have done an excellent job there."

The plan wasn't to use Newcombe at I-back only in case of injuries.

"We had a plan out of a set or two where he would run a lot of different kinds of things."

The game plan also included a "nice reverse" for Newcombe. "But there came a time when we worried . . . you know, you're moving the ball, you're getting enough yards straight ahead on the ground that who wants to run a reverse and get caught for a big loss," said Solich.

"So the timing just wasn't right to run that reverse."

Newcombe, who returned a punt 60 yards for a touchdown late in the first quarter, also was included on the kickoff return team. "We have a lot of things in to get him the ball," Solich said. "It maybe didn't show in this ball game, but we'll continue to try to get him the ball."

Newcombe made the punt return for a touchdown look easy. But he claimed it looked easy because of those around him. "The one thing I remember about that is just our guys doing an excellent job of blocking," he said. "I saw a little crease, and tried to accelerate through that."

"Next thing I know, Ralph Brown is making an excellent block."

CROUCH'S SHOULDER SURGERY GOES WELL

Quarterback Eric Crouch underwent arthroscopic surgery on his right shoulder following his return from the Fiesta Bowl game. Dr. Robert Dugas, a team physician, performed the surgery.

The surgery went well, according to Doak Ostergard, head football trainer.

"We didn't see anything we didn't expect to see in there," Ostergard said. "We cleaned it up, and he will be participating in practice by the spring. We are definitely expecting a full recovery from him."

Crouch, Big 12 co-offensive player of the year, will be a junior. "After talking with his doctors, we are very confident that he will be 100 percent next year," said Coach Frank Solich.

NOTEWORTHY

— Crouch's 13-yard touchdown pass to redshirted freshman tight end Aaron Golliday in the third quarter was Nebraska's first in 19 quarters.

The Cornhuskers' last touchdown pass had been in the fourth quarter of the Kansas game, when Crouch and wingback Bobby Newcombe teamed up on a 49-yard scoring play.

— Crouch was named the offensive player of the game. Rover Mike Brown was named the defensive player of the game.

— The game was a homecoming for Brown, who went to high school in nearby Scottsdale. His final game at Saguaro High School also was played at Sun Devil Stadium.

"I really can't put it into words right now," Brown said of how he felt after his final game as a Cornhusker. "Coming over here on the bus, I was just thinking about winning the game."

"We did that. Now I can always remember my last game as a 'W.' I'm just proud of, you know, all that I've accomplished in four years, all this team has accomplished."

Weakside linebacker Eric Johnson (Phoenix) and nose tackle Jon Clanton (Glendale) also came from Arizona. Former Cornhusker Ryan Held was a Tennessee graduate assistant.

— Nebraska went into the game ranked No. 3 in both the Associated Press and coaches' polls. The Cornhuskers moved up to No. 2 in the coaches' poll but remained No. 3 in the AP poll following Florida State's 46-29 victory against Virginia Tech in the Sugar Bowl game the next night. "As far as I'm concerned, they're No. 1," defensive coordinator Charlie McBride said of the Cornhuskers.

McBride began his career as a full-time assistant under Frank Kush at Arizona State, and his first coaching victory came at Sun Devil Stadium. To be able to enjoy a victory in the stadium in his last game as a coach "means so much to me," an emotional McBride said afterward.

— Fullback Tyrone Uhlir, I-back Dahrran Diedrick and middle linebacker Tony Tata were suspended for the game for what Coach Frank Solich described as "failure to follow team policy."

The suspension was only for one game. "It's been dealt with," Solich said.

— The Phoenix area is known as the Valley of the Sun. But the temperature at game time was 55 degrees, and it dipped into the low 40s, making the game Nebraska's coldest of the season. ■

BY THE NUMBERS

Nebraska vs. Tennessee • Fiesta Bowl
Jan. 2, 2000 • Sun Devil Stadium • Tempe, Ariz.

Score By Quarters

Tennessee	0	7	7	7	—	21
Nebraska	14	3	7	7	—	31

Team Stats

	UT	NU
First Downs	17	23
Rushing	2	16
Passing	13	6
Penalty	2	1
Rushing Attempts	26	56
Yards Gained Rushing	59	342
Yards Lost Rushing	15	21
Net Yards Rushing	44	321
Net Yards Passing	267	148
Passes Attempted	35	15
Passes Completed	20	9
Had Intercepted	2	0
Total Plays	61	71
Total Net Yards	311	469
Avg. Gain Per Play	5.1	6.6
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-1
Penalties-Yards	5-41	8-59
Punts-Yards	7-302	6-237
Avg. Per Punt	42.1	39.5
Punt Returns-Yards	4-0	4-72
Interceptions-Yards	0-0	2-9
Fumble Returns-Yards	1-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	3-64	1-13
Possession Time	26:05	33:55

Scoring

NU — Dan Alexander 7-yard run (Josh Brown kick)
NU — Bobby Newcombe 60-yard punt return (Brown kick)
NU — Brown 31-yard field goal
UT — Dante' Stallworth 9-yard pass from Tee Martin (Alex Walls kick)
UT — Travis Henry 4-yard run (Walls kick)
NU — Aaron Golliday 13-yard pass from Eric Crouch (Brown kick)
NU — Correll Buckhalter 2-yard run (Brown kick)
UT — Stallworth 44-yard pass from Cedrick Wilson (Walls kick)

Att. — 71,526

Individual Leaders

TENNESSEE

RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Henry, T.	10	31	3.1	10	1
Martin, T.	8	-6	-0.8	3	0
Lewis, J.	8	19	2.4	5	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Martin, T.	19-34-2	55.9	223	1
Wilson, C.	1-1-0	100.0	44	1

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Martin, D.	1	49	49.0	49	0
Wilson, C.	7	75	10.7	15	0
Stallworth, D.	8	108	13.5	44	2
Parker, E.	1	3	3.0	3	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Leaverton, D.	7	302	43.1	48

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Parker, E.	4	0	0.0	17	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Scott, L.	3	64	21.3	25	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Westmoreland, E.	3	7	10	1-7	0	1-7
Overstreet, W.	3	6	9	1.5-2	0	0
Grant, D.	5	3	8	1-2	0	0
Stevenson, D.	3	5	8	0	0	0
Walker, D.	2	4	7	0	0	0
White, F.	3	4	7	0	0	0
Thompson, R.	1	6	7	1-2	0	0
Ellis, S.	5	1	6	2-9	0	1-5
Goodrich, D.	4	1	5	0	0	0
Haynesworth, A.	0	5	5	0	0	0
Whiteside, K.	1	3	4	1-1	0	0
Henderson, J.	1	2	3	0	0	0
Lott, A.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Sessions, A.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Moore, R.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Smith, O.	1	1	1	1-3	0	0
Allen, M.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Jackson, B.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Graznow, J.	0	0	1	1	0	0
Hand, O.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Butler, E.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Crosby, P.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Miles, W.	0	1	1	0	0	0

NEBRASKA

RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Alexander, D.	21	108	5.1	15	1
Miller, W.	8	87	10.9	47	0
Crouch, E.	17	64	3.8	30	0
Buckhalter, C.	8	59	7.4	27	1
Applegate, S.	1	5	5.0	5	0
Team	1	-2	-2.0	0	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	9-15-0	60.0	148	1

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Davison, M.	2	68	34.0	44	0
Bowling, J.	2	45	22.5	28	0
Golliday, A.	2	25	12.5	13	1
Newcombe, B.	2	5	2.5	7	0
Buckhalter, C.	1	5	5.0	5	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	6	237	39.5	48

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Newcombe, B.	3	69	23.0	60	1
Walker, J.	1	3	3.0	3	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Kingston, B.	1	13	13.0	13	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Brown, R.	7	1	8	1-3	0	0
Booker, D.	4	4	8	0	0	0
Brown, M.	3	4	7	0	1-0	0
Polk, C.	2	5	7	0	0	0
Wills, A.	4	1	5	3-6	0	2-5
Jackson, J.	0	4	4	0	0	0
Warren, S.	2	1	3	2-5	0	0
Kaiser, L.	1	2	3	5-1	0	0
Stella, R.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Craver, K.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Walker, J.	1	1	2	0	1-(-9)	0
Finley, C.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Shaw, B.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	1	0	1	1-2	0	1-2
Johnson, E.	1	0	1	1-1	0	0
Kelsay, C.	0	1	1	1-1	0	0
Ortiz, T.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Groce, D.	1	0	1	0	0	0
List, G.	1	0	1	0	0	0

'99 SEASON STATS

(Note: Bowl stats do not count in final 1999 totals)

RUSHING

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Crouch, E.	12	180	889	74.1	18
Alexander, D.	12	134	885	72.1	8
Buckhalter, C.	11	111	662	60.2	6
Diedrick, D.	12	57	303	25.2	2
Miller, W.	10	55	195	19.5	2
Newcombe, B.	12	37	87	7.2	3
Evans, D.	2	19	74	37.0	0
Perino, J.	7	15	67	9.6	0
Uhlir, T.	12	11	30	2.5	0
Kingston, B.	11	6	19	1.7	0
Applegate, S.	12	3	8	0.7	0
Albertson, M.	2	1	3	1.5	0
Chrisman, J.	3	2	0	0.0	0
Hadenfeldt, D.	12	1	-1	-1.0	0
London, F.	10	1	-10	-10.0	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	12	83-160-4	51.9	1,269	7
Newcombe, B.	12	11-19-1	57.9	246	2
Perino, J.	7	0-1-0	00.0	0	0
Chrisman, J.	2	0-4-0	00.0	0	0

RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Davison, M.	12	29	441	15.2	36.8	2
Newcombe, B.	12	19	233	12.5	19.8	3
Wistrom, T.	11	16	429	26.8	39.0	2
Applegate, S.	12	5	103	20.6	8.6	1
Alexander, D.	12	4	56	14.0	4.7	0
Golliday, A.	12	3	53	17.7	4.4	0
Miller, W.	10	3	26	8.7	2.6	0
Buckhalter, C.	11	3	21	7.0	1.9	0
Crouch, E.	12	2	46	23.0	3.8	1
Bowling, J.	7	2	30	15.0	4.3	0
Gibson, J.	10	2	19	9.5	1.9	0
London, F.	10	2	11	5.5	1.1	0
DeBates, T.	12	1	18	18.0	1.5	0
Diedrick, D.	12	1	9	9.0	0.8	0
Beveridge, T.	9	1	9	9.0	1.0	0
McKee, J.	5	1	6	6.0	1.2	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, J.	12	20	14	42

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	65	2,924	45.0	73

DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Brown, M.	12	56	40	96	8-46	5-40	2-20
Polk, C.	12	32	51	83	12-56	0	6.5-47
Wills, A.	12	25	31	56	7-23	0	2-14
Craver, K.	12	34	17	51	2-3	3-18	0
Warren, S.	12	23	22	45	15-86	0	7-65
Ortiz, T.	12	21	23	44	7-32	1-6	3-26
Brown, R.	12	28	12	40	2-9	3-82	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	11	21	17	37	11-68	0	4.5-46
Johnson, E.	9	13	24	37	8-26	0	4-20
Kaiser, L.	12	11	25	36	6-24	0	3.5-22
Jackson, J.	12	17	18	35	9-34	3-40	5-29
Lohr, J.	12	11	22	33	5-19	0	3.5-17
Booker, D.	12	15	13	28	0	1-37	0
Finley, C.	12	16	11	27	0	1-0	0
Groce, D.	12	12	12	24	0	0	0
Shaw, B.	12	9	14	23	2-14	0	1-13
Slechta, J.	7	10	9	19	5-22	0	3-20
Vedral, M.	12	8	8	16	1-1	0	0
Kelsay, C.	11	8	8	16	1-3	0	1.5-3
Burrow, J.	12	7	7	14	1-4	0	0
Smith, J.	11	5	7	12	2-10	0	1.5-10
Walker, J.	10	8	3	11	4-27	0	3-26
Stella, R.	11	4	5	9	1-8	0	1-8
Hemje, J.	9	6	2	8	0	0	0
List, G.	12	5	1	6	1-4	0	0
Adams, D.	11	4	1	5	2-5	0	1.5-3
Ryan, E.	12	1	4	5	0	0	0
Garrison, J.	12	2	2	4	0	0	0
Diedrick, D.	12	2	2	4	0	0	0
Wichmann, J.	6	3	1	4	2-6	0	1.5-6
Gehman, T.	5	2	1	3	0	0	0
Golliday, A.	12	3	0	3	0	0	0
Baker, R.	7	1	2	3	0	0	0
Buettnerback, B.	7	1	2	3	0	0	0
McGraw, G.	12	2	0	2	0	0	0
Hadenfeldt, D.	12	1	1	2	0	0	0
Mooberry, B.	5	0	2	2	0	0	0
Nelson, C.	3	0	2	2	0	0	0
Woodward, W.	7	0	2	2	0	0	0

Tata, T.; Raymond, S.; Rauenzahn, T.; Shanley, S.; Thomas, W.; Clanton, J.; Wistrom, T.; Davison, M.; Applegate, S.; McGinn, M.; Fischer, E.; Terpening, A. (also had one interception); Anderson, J.; each credited with 1 tackle.

TEAM STATISTICS

	NU	OPP
Total Offensive Yards	4,706	3,027
Plays	817	816

FUTURE SCHEDULES

2000

Sept. 2	San Jose State
Sept. 9	@ Notre Dame
Sept. 23	Iowa
Sept. 30	Missouri
Oct. 7	@ Iowa State
Oct. 14	@ Texas Tech
Oct. 21	Baylor
Oct. 28	@ Oklahoma
Nov. 4	Kansas
Nov. 11	@ Kansas State
Nov. 24	Colorado

2001

Sept. 1	TBA
Sept. 8	Notre Dame
Sept. 15	Rice
Sept. 29	@ Missouri
Oct. 6	Iowa State
Oct. 13	@ Baylor
Oct. 20	Texas Tech
Oct. 27	Oklahoma
Nov. 3	@ Kansas
Nov. 10	Kansas State
Nov. 23	@ Colorado

2002

Sept. 7	Utah State
Sept. 14	@ Penn State
Sept. 21	TBA
Oct. 5	@ Iowa State
Oct. 12	Missouri
Oct. 19	@ Oklahoma St.
Oct. 26	@ Texas A&M
Nov. 2	Texas
Nov. 9	Kansas
Nov. 16	@ Kansas State
Nov. 29	Colorado

2003

Sept. 6	Utah State
Sept. 13	Penn State
Sept. 20	@ Southern Miss.
Oct. 4	Oklahoma State
Oct. 11	@ Missouri
Oct. 18	Texas A&M
Oct. 25	Iowa State
Nov. 1	@ Texas
Nov. 8	@ Kansas
Nov. 15	Kansas State
Nov. 28	@ Colorado

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1999 HIGHS . .

Solich's second team showed the resilience of a champion

By Mike Babcock

Frank Solich admitted concern following Nebraska's 24-20 loss at Texas in late October.

"I worried," he said. "I think as a head coach, you've always got to have concern as to how things will transpire coming off of a loss, and certainly when your team has great ambition at the start of the season, has set goals very, very high and (then) maybe a goal has been eliminated.

"I was a little concerned. But I don't think our players were concerned. I think they felt that there was going to be nothing that was going to deter them from having a great season."

Concerned or not, the Cornhuskers needed time to recover from the Texas loss, which all but ended their hopes of achieving their goal of winning a national championship.

"You have to go undefeated to win the national championship," co-captain Mike Brown said the next week. "I think we realize it would be a pretty weird situation for us to play for the national championship. So I think we just kind of tried to put that out of our mind and focus on our team."

As it turned out, Nebraska's hopes of playing in the Sugar Bowl for the national championship were rekindled in late November as a result of impressive victories at home against Texas A&M and Kansas State and a much stronger schedule than that of No. 2-ranked Virginia Tech.

But those hopes were wiped out by a 33-30 overtime victory at Colorado. The consensus was, Nebraska needed impressive victories against Colorado and Texas, in a rematch in the Big 12 playoff, if it were going to overtake Virginia Tech in the Bowl Championship Series rankings.

Even so, Solich's second team showed the resilience of a champion.

"What I think is special about this team is the character," Brown said after the Texas loss. "I think we're

going to be able to bounce back," which the Cornhuskers did.

The bounce-back came in the second half of a 24-17 victory at Kansas, according to Solich.

"That was somewhat of a turning point for us," he said.

Although identifying one play as THE turning point in the season would be a gross oversimplification, Bobby Newcombe's 86-yard punt return for a touchdown with 2:14 remaining in the third quarter of the Kansas game certainly qualifies as a turning point.

Newcombe's touchdown gave Nebraska its first lead, at 10-9.

"I didn't see the punt until the last second," said Newcombe, who made the play sound easy. "I caught the ball, got a bunch of good blocks, made one move here and another move there and was able to utilize my speed and run down the sideline. I got another great block by Ralph Brown at the end."

Ironically, Newcombe probably wouldn't have been in a position to return that punt if the season had played out the way it began because he would have been a quarterback, and had he been a quarterback, it's doubtful Solich would have been willing to let him return punts and risk injury.

Newcombe's switch from quarterback to wingback and Eric Crouch's becoming the starting quarterback before the third game against Southern Mississippi were among the most significant events of an eventful season. The week those decisions were made, I-back DeAngelo Evans quit the team.

The events of the early-season made for "probably the toughest couple of weeks, maybe month, in coaching for me," Solich said. "But those days are going to come along.

"You ask your players to work through things. You do it as a coach also.



Bobby Newcombe's 86-yard punt return for a touchdown in the third quarter of the Kansas game was a turning point in the season.

"So we're moving forward. I feel comfortable about things. Our football team feels comfortable about things. You guys (reporters) will get a feel for that when you visit with them.

"In any case, I'm still coaching. I love the game. Some days are better than others."

Obviously, Solich had many more good days than bad days as the season progressed, particularly after the Cornhuskers were able to rally in the second half of the Kansas game.

"When you're a top program you always like to think that you can shoot for a national championship, and certainly you'd like to think that you can shoot for a Big 12 championship," he said.

"But this team has been about winning football games."

After the Texas loss, "they got back on track with that right away."

Newcombe's punt return helped get things back on track. It was among the highest of the highs. But there were many other highs, some of which follow, along with a few of the lows. ■



LOW BUT HIGH

Nebraska averaged 265.9 rushing yards per game, its second-lowest average since 1977. Last season, the Cornhuskers averaged 253.8 rushing yards per game, to rank sixth nationally.

They struggled early in the season, rushing for a combined 233 yards in victories against California and Southern Mississippi to drop to 25th nationally and fifth among Big 12 teams.

"Believe me, I would like to run for 300-plus yards every game," Coach Frank Solich said after Nebraska rushed for 240 yards in a 38-14 victory against Oklahoma State.

"When I talk about us being a multiple offense, I think we're multiple when we have to be. We will still start off trying to run the football. But we will mix in a fair share of passes, and I believe that's probably going to be the thing that will open up our running game a little bit.

"We've been faced with a number of defenses that have really crowded a lot of people on the line of scrimmage. At

times, you're able to make some big plays through the running game that way.

"But it's probably a little easier to get a few things done and get some big plays through the passing game when you've got everybody up close to the line of scrimmage."

Opposing defenses continued to crowd the line of scrimmage. But none had as much success in stopping the Cornhuskers' running attack as did California and Southern Mississippi.

Nebraska rushed for more than 300 yards in consecutive victories against Texas A&M (335), Kansas State (309) and Colorado (356) to finish a respectable fourth in the nation.

HIGH BUT LOW

Quarterback Eric Crouch was Nebraska's leading rusher, with 889 yards and 16 touchdowns on 180 carries. The last time a quarterback led the Cornhuskers in rushing was 1955.

Rex Fischer rushed for 599 yards and three touchdowns on 133 carries.

I-back Dan Alexander was second on the team in rushing, with 865 yards and eight touchdowns on 134 carries. The junior from Wentzville, Mo., made significant improvement, despite being hampered by injuries and fumble problems. "He's always been a physical, tough player," said Solich.

"I think he's improved on his movement. At one time, he was pretty much a straight-ahead guy and that was about it. But now he's showing really good speed at times and the ability to make people miss, and (he's) using good judgment, when to use all his power and when to try to make people miss."

Crouch and Alexander return, as does Correll Buckhalter, the third-leading rusher.

In fact, the Cornhuskers' top six rushers will be back next season.

Crouch led the nation's major college quarterbacks in touchdowns, with 17 (including one on a pass reception as a receiver) and ranked second among the nation's quarterbacks in rushing yardage.

HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS

Alexander credited Buckhalter with helping him to improve this season. Among the things on which he worked was "trying to get my knees up," said Alexander. "I worked a lot with Correll about that. Correll, he's a great running back and he just runs with great high knees.

"So I take pointers from him because he's had more game experience than I have.

"I look a lot of times to Correll and to the other backs, Coach Solich and Coach (Dave) Gillespie to tell me what to do and help me refine my techniques and stuff."

Alexander also ran more aggressively this season.

"I think sometimes I was a little bit timid and I wasn't running my game," Alexander said. "For some reason I was trying to run like a prototypical I-back instead of just going back to how I've been successful. It really just came down to a confidence issue that I needed to help boost up."

Alexander, who is hardly a prototypical I-back at 6-feet tall and 245 pounds, also got the boost from his religious faith. He went through "a lot of spiritual issues," he said.

"I really needed to get right with God."

FUMBLE(IT)IS

A remarkable aspect of the Cornhuskers' success this season is that it was achieved despite a school-record 49 fumbles, 25 of which were lost to lead NCAA Division I-A.

They posted decisive victories against Texas A&M (37-0) and Kansas State (41-15) on consecutive Saturdays despite fumbling a combined 18 times and losing eight.

Three lost fumbles contributed significantly to their 24-20 loss at Texas.

The fumbles were a constant source of frustration for Solich.

"We've looked at it from the angle of: Is what we're doing offensively putting us at more risk than what we've been doing in the past," he said. "And that's

... and LOWS

not really been the case.

"We've had as many balls on the ground just from backs and receivers having the ball in their arm, the quarterback having the ball in his arm, and having it knocked out as we have had from trying to execute an option play. In fact, it has been probably more the other way."

It seemed as if the harder players tried to avoid fumbles, the more likely they were to fumble.

"You can't hide from turnovers," said Solich. "You just can't ignore them. But on the other side of it, when you address your players, I think you address it from a positive vein rather than yelling: 'Don't fumble the ball.' I learned very early on in my career that doesn't necessarily work."

"So we try to be a little bit more positive. We try to give them (ball carriers) things like: 'High and tight. I'm seeing a little bit of that ball from behind. Roll it forward.' We just use all kinds of phrases, catch phrases, for them to put their mind on good ball technique."

IF HE COULD DO IT OVER . . .

Nebraska took possession of the ball following a Keyuo Craver fumble recovery at the Colorado 16-yard line with 1:49 remaining in regulation and the score tied at 27.

Most who remained in a sellout crowd of 52,946 at Folsom Field in Boulder expected Solich to call for three plays into the line and then send in Josh Brown to kick a field goal.

Instead, Solich called an option play to the left on first down. Crouch pitched the ball to Alexander, who couldn't get a hold on it, and Colorado recovered at its own 15-yard line.

Five plays later, the Buffaloes had the ball at the Nebraska 16-yard line, with one second remaining and an opportunity to win the game on 34-yard field goal by Jeremy Aldrich.

Somehow the kick went wide right, forcing the overtime.

Even though the Cornhuskers won with a touchdown by fullback Willie Miller in overtime, the option pitch on first down deserves consideration as the worst play of the year.

Or, perhaps, it should be called the most injudicious play of the year.

"That play drew a lot of attention," Solich said three days later. "But let me tell you, the first play in the overtime series, which doesn't seem to have attracted any attention to anybody, was one that I debated every bit as much as I debated before calling the sprint to the left in the last two minutes."

"That was a first-down pass play. We were down by three points in the over-



Nebraska fumbled a school-record 49 times, losing 25, including this one at the Texas 2, early in the fourth quarter of the 24-20 loss.

time period. And believe me, a pass play can end up every bit like an option play can end up, with the ball in the wrong people's hands. You can get caught for second-and-long, which is not what you're looking for there."

Instead, Nebraska gained 4 yards on a pass from Crouch to split end Matt Davison.

"A lot of it just comes back to the approach we decided to take in the game," Solich said of the play calling. "It happens pretty quickly and you have 25 seconds to get a play in."

The Cornhuskers faced third-and-3 at the 18-yard line in the overtime, and Miller gained 6 yards for the first down. "The way Dan Alexander was running the football, you say: 'Wait a minute; do you give the ball to Dan Alexander or who do you give the ball to on this very important play?'"

Nebraska's first-down and third-down plays in overtime, "were every bit as important of calls in that football

game as the ones where we ran the option," said Solich.

As for the first-down option, "I wouldn't run it again," he said.

FORCED TO WATCH, ALONE

Offensive tackle Jason Schwab suffered a season-ending knee injury during two-a-day practices. But he remained involved and never missed a game, though having to watch road games on television.

Most of the time, he watched at home, by himself or with roommate Tony Tata, a linebacker.

Schwab went to a sports bar in Lincoln to watch the Kansas game, however.

"I got something to eat, sat there and watched," Schwab said. "Then I took off. I left at the half and went home to watch the rest of the game. It's kind of funny listening to people talk. You want to say: 'Hey, you have no clue what you're talking about.' But you really just kind of block it out."

Schwab watched the opener at Iowa with his parents, who came to Lincoln that weekend.

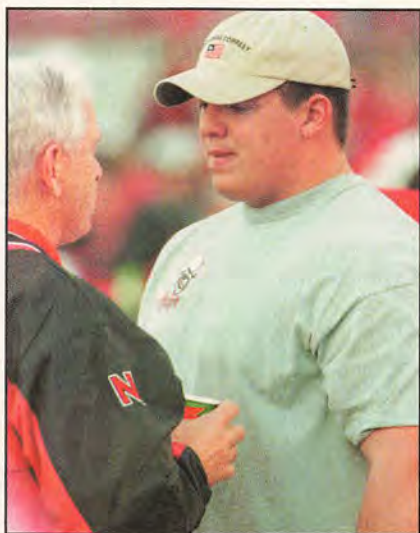
"It was just like it is before a game for me," said Schwab. "I was getting sick, a nervous stomach, and my hands were shaking. And I was sitting in a chair with a cast on my leg."

Schwab was granted a sixth year of eligibility because of the injuries.

ACADEMIC PERFECTION

Senior strongside linebacker Brian Shaw was the first Cornhusker football player to maintain a perfect 4.0 grade-point average since offensive tackle Rob Zatechka (1991-94).

Shaw, who came to Nebraska as a walk-on, also joined Zatechka and punter Mike Stigge (1989-92) as the only Nebraska football players to be four-time, first-team academic all-conference



Tackle Jason Schwab missed the season with a knee injury but has been granted a sixth season.



Nebraska's rushing success depended on the development of the line, including sophomore center Dominic Raiola (54) and freshman guard Toni Fonoti (77).

selections.

"When I came in, I didn't really have a goal to go out and get a 4.0," said Shaw.

"I just wanted to be good student. Then come two or three years down the road and I've just realized that I've still got A's in the classroom. Then it's something you want to work for."

Shaw was a second-team Academic All-American, while senior rover Mike Brown and junior rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch were first-team selections. The Cornhuskers have had at least one first-team Academic All-American for 14 consecutive years. They've had two the last three years.

Nebraska leads NCAA Division I-A schools in football first-team Academic All-Americans with 57. Notre Dame is second on the all-time list with 38 first-team honorees.

IT'S WHAT'S UP FRONT THAT COUNTS

Nebraska's success rushing the ball depended on the development of the offensive line, of course. Center Dominic Raiola and junior guard Russ Hochstein both earned first-team All-Big 12 recognition, Raiola from the conference coaches and Hochstein from the Associated Press.

Raiola also was a first-team All-American according to CNN/SI.com.

Raiola set a school single-season record with 140 "pancake," or knock-down, blocks. Hochstein was second on the team with 126 "pancakes."

"We're not the same offensive football team we were last year, and they're certainly not the same offensive line," Solich said the week before the Big 12 playoff.

"Many of them are the same offensive linemen. But they were young and inexperienced. They were guys who were developing in our program. And right now they're full of confidence."

The good news is, Raiola, Hochstein and tackle Dave Volk return next season, and Schwab, who was sidelined by a knee injury, was granted another season of eligibility by the NCAA.

TOM SAID WHAT?

Tom Osborne, Solich's Hall of Fame predecessor, put pressure on the Cornhusker defense by describing it as potentially among the best in school history. He made that comment during a guest appearance on a college football telecast on the Fox Sports cable network.

"You know, I have not gotten a hold of Coach Osborne this week," Solich said to laughter at his weekly news conference three days later. "And he has not gotten a hold of me."

As for Osborne's claim, "that remains to be seen," said Solich.

The claim was surprising, not because the Blackshirts didn't have the potential to be as good as Osborne said but rather because such an assertion



All-America selection Mike Brown led the Huskers in tackles for the third straight year.

seemed out of character for Osborne.

"He's looking at it probably from knowing the personnel we've had in the past," defensive coordinator Charlie McBride said in response to a question about the remark.

"The biggest thing, and I've said it over and over again, is the character of these players. I don't know where I've been around a group that was probably self-motivated more than they are."

Osborne's assessment was born out. Nebraska's defense ranked among the nation's best. The Cornhuskers finished the regular season ranked in the top six in four major defensive categories. Only two other Division I-A teams could make that claim: Virginia Tech and Mississippi State.

Nebraska ranked second in the nation in pass efficiency defense (87.9), third in scoring defense (12.5), fourth in total defense (252.3) and sixth in rushing defense (77.1).

DOMINIC SAID WHAT?

Raiola was placed off-limits to reporters by Solich and offensive line coach Milt Tenopir after being quoted as saying he hated Texas — the week before the Texas game.

He also said he didn't like the song "Eyes of Texas."

The ban was lifted the week after the Cornhuskers defeated Texas in a rematch in the Big 12 championship game. "I was happy it happened," Raiola told the Lincoln Journal Star.

"It made me realize to get focused on getting things done and not talking so much."

Raiola claimed he liked "Rocky Top," the Tennessee fight song. Really.

BROWN & BROWN

Cornerback Ralph Brown and rover Mike Brown finished their distinguished careers at Nebraska in style. Ralph increased his school career record for pass breakups to 50, more than twice as many as Bret Clark (1982-84), who is second on the Cornhuskers' all-time list with 21.

Ralph also broke his single-season record for pass breakups with 15.

He is tied for third in career pass interceptions with 11.

In addition, with his start against Tennessee in the Fiesta Bowl game, he is tied for first in consecutive starts all-time among major college football players, with 52. (Bowl games don't count for other NCAA statistics.)

Mike Brown led Nebraska in tackles for a third consecutive season and moved up to second on the Cornhuskers' career-tackles list, with 287. Jerry Murtaugh (1968-70) is first with 342.

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Mike was only the third player, and the first defensive back, to lead the team in tackles for three seasons.

Ralph and Mike both earned first-team All-America honors, Ralph from the Walter Camp Foundation, The Sporting News and the Football News and Mike from the Football Writers and CBS Sportsline.

Mike had been overshadowed by Ralph, who was the only Cornhusker included on the preseason All-Big 12 team. But he emerged this season. He "is as good of a football player at the position as we've ever had here. Mike's thing is not only his intelligence but his confidence," said McBride.

Mike was the Blackshirts' surest tackler. "He's probably the best tackler we've had in the secondary that I can remember ever being around," McBride said.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

The season didn't start all that well for Solich. There were rumors that Crouch was considering quitting the team after Bobby Newcombe was named the starting quarterback. The rumors were fueled by a Solich visit to Omaha, Crouch's home, on the Monday after the announcement.

Backup quarterback Jay Runty did quit the team at that time, and it appeared Buckhalter also had quit the team after he skipped three days of practices and meetings.

The biggest surprise, however, was the departure of starting I-back DeAngelo Evans, who left the team after the California game. "Certainly that's disappointing and difficult for everybody involved," Solich said during his weekly news conference the next Tuesday.

"I think it's difficult for DeAngelo. It's certainly difficult for this football team. It's difficult for our coaches. You never want to have a player, for whatever reason, not be able to finish out the season or finish out his career at your school. But that is the way it is. And we will just need to move forward."

Evans didn't handle the situation well, making disparaging comments about Solich, who had supported him through difficult times with injuries. The situation contributed significantly to what Solich called probably "the toughest couple of weeks, maybe month, in coaching for me."

"But those days are going to come along. You ask your players to work through things. And you do it as a coach also. So we're moving forward. I feel comfortable about things. Our football team feels comfortable about things. I'm still coaching. I love the team. I love the sport."

"Some days are better than others." ■

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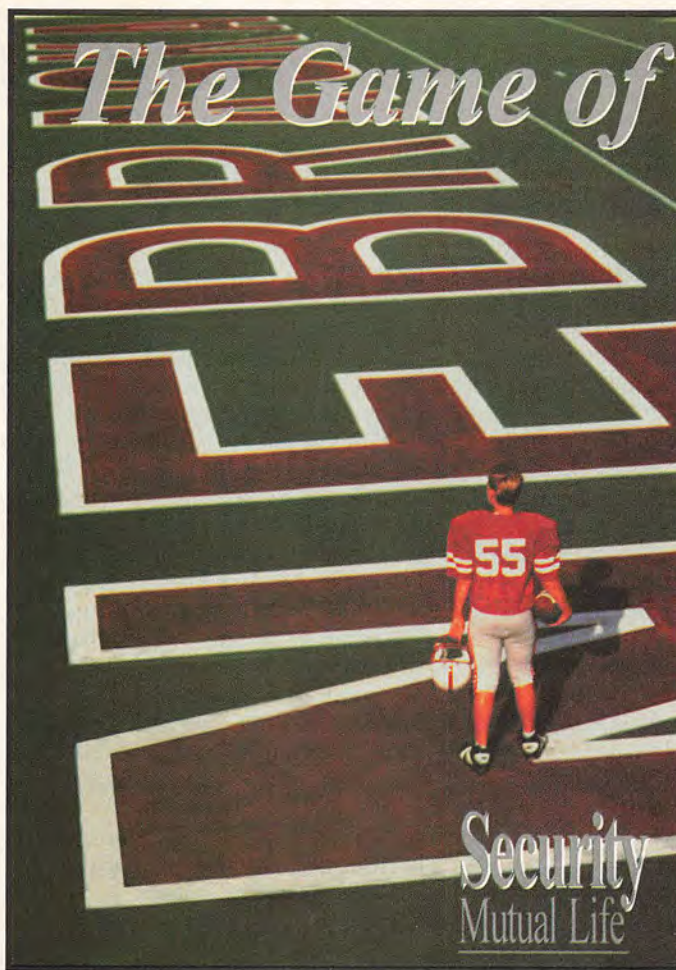
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*W. W. Rick Anderson.
 Com*

HOOPS

Inspirational

Sophomore forward Truscott returns from injury to help Huskers knock off Minnesota

Louis Truscott tried to explain his inspirational, off-the-bench performance in Nebraska's surprising 90-78 victory against Minnesota on New Year's Eve afternoon.

"It had to be the socks," Truscott said with a smile.

His socks had been pulled up to his knees.

They didn't explain how he had scored 15 points in just 19 minutes against a Golden Gopher team that brought an 8-1 record to the Devaney Sports Center, however.

What did motivate him was the opportunity to play after missing three games because of a knee injury suffered during a practice in which teammate Steffon Bradford had fallen onto the knee.

Truscott was watching a drill at the time.

He was expected to miss another game, but "I was really anxious to get back," said Truscott. "It was hard sitting on the bench, watching the team struggle and not being able to contribute.

"I got tired of missing all the big games."

Actually there was just one big game he missed. He had to watch in street clothes as Nebraska lost to No. 4-ranked Arizona 80-59 at Las Vegas in mid-December.

He also missed home games against San Francisco and Oral

Roberts.

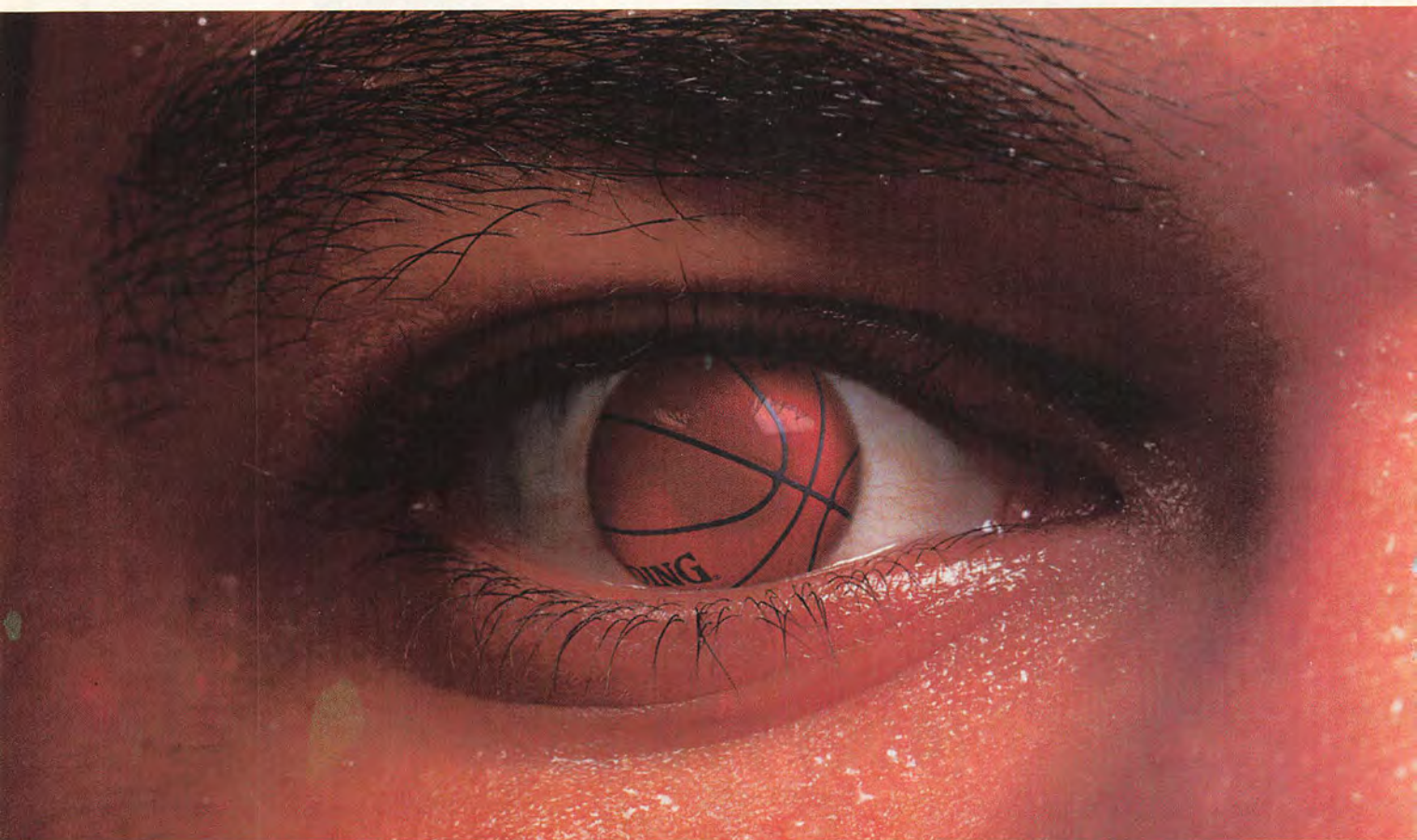
"He kept telling me he was going to play (against Minnesota)," Coach Danny Nee told reporters afterward. "He was a godsend. He got really tired, but he saved our butts."

The sophomore from Houston sees that as his role for now. Even though he started the two games in the Ameritas Classic, he's comfortable coming off the bench. "My role, I think, is giving a spark to the team, hustling, rebounding, running the floor and getting open shots," Truscott said.

And he's capable of hitting the open shots when he gets them. He shot 50 percent from the field during

Louis Truscott (51) came off the bench to score 15 points in just 19 minutes against the Golden Gophers.

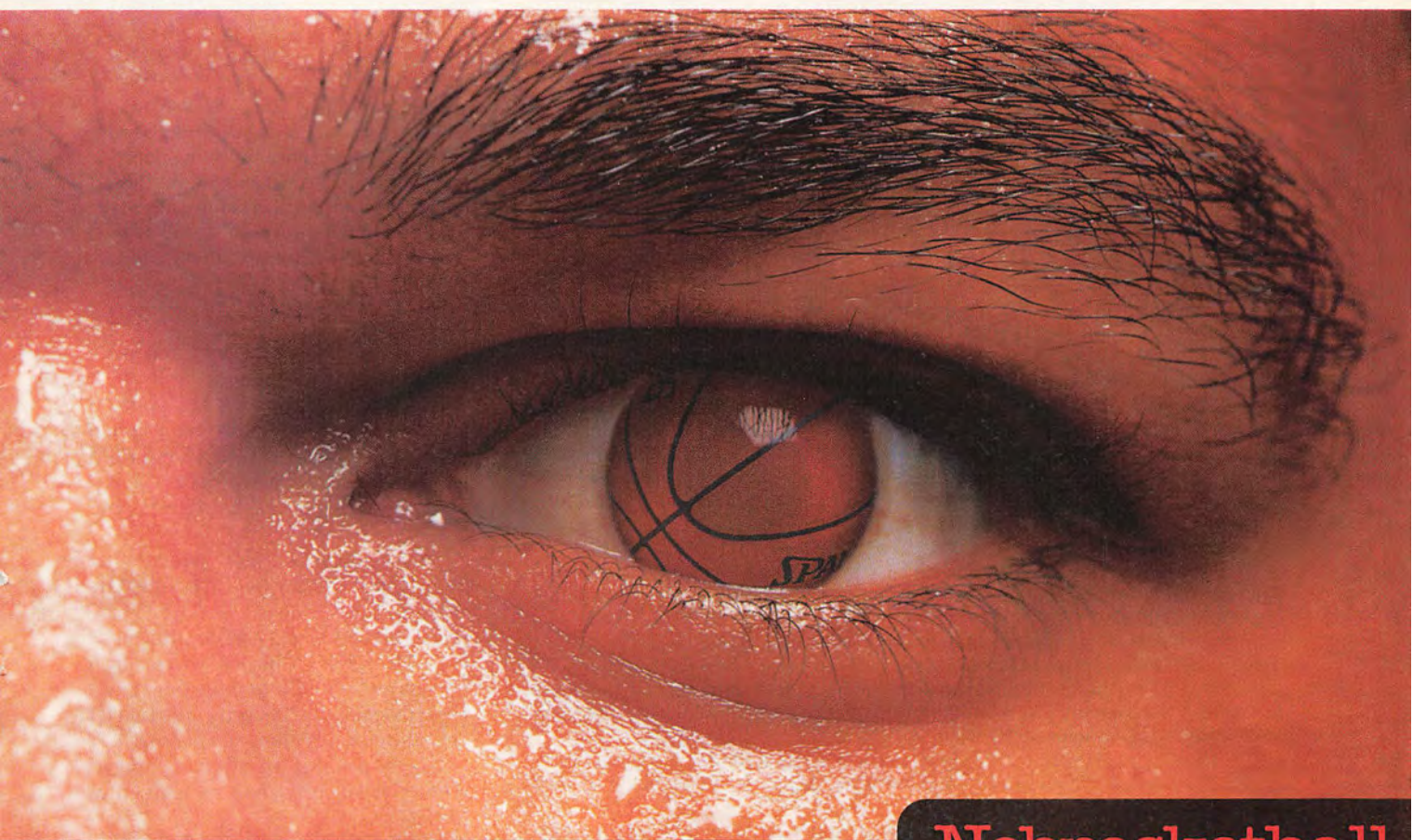
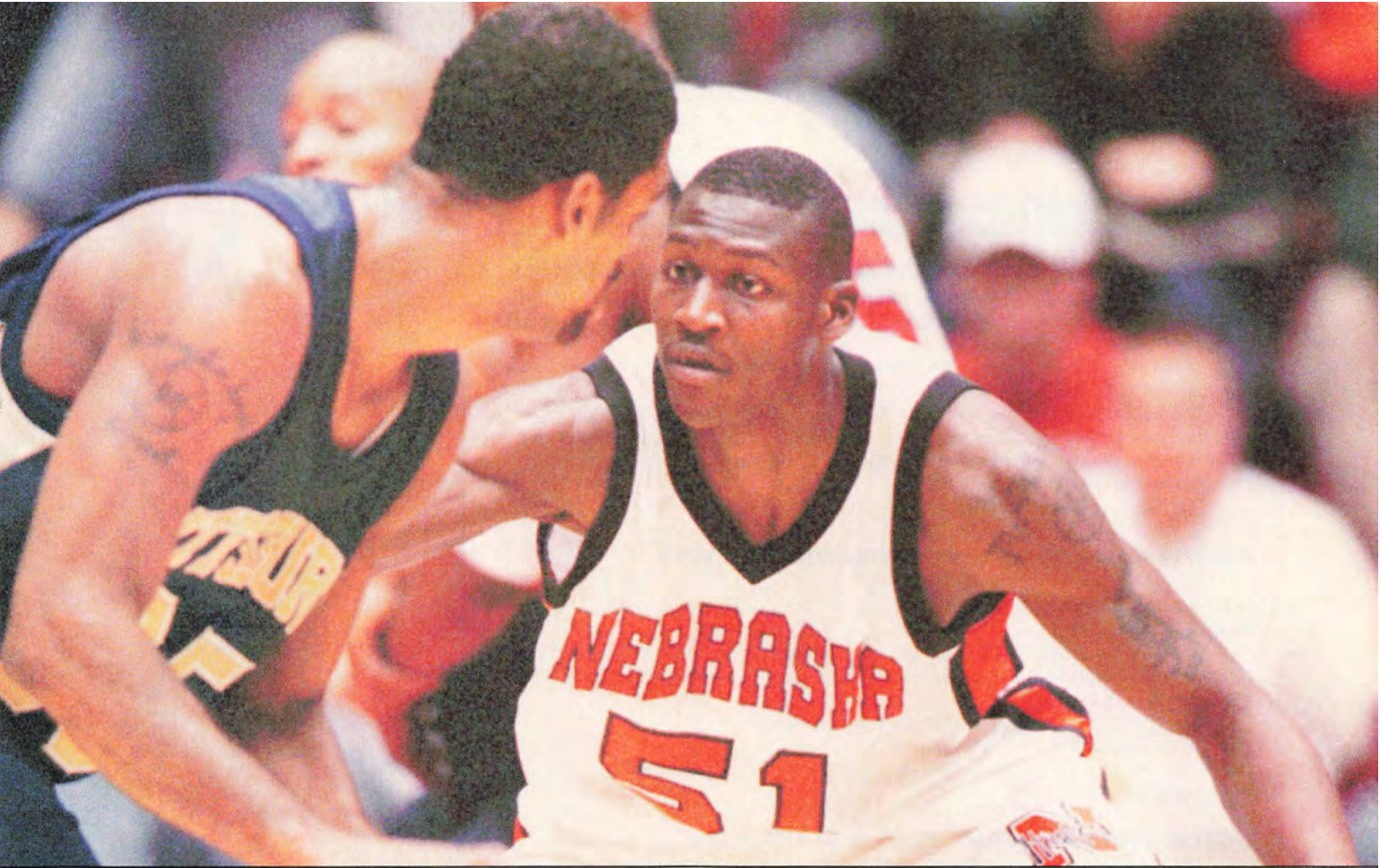
Scott Braun



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Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

MEN FINISH NON-CONFERENCE SCHEDULE WITH 7-6 MARK

Danny Nee's team finished its non-conference schedule with a winning record for a 19th consecutive winning season. The Cornhuskers won their last three non-conference games to go 7-6.

Nebraska had dropped to 4-6 after losses at Arizona (80-59) and to San Francisco (64-60).

The Cornhuskers defeated Pacific 92-68 at the Devaney Sports Center to wrap up non-conference play and give Nee victory No. 250 at Nebraska. He went into Big 12 Conference play needing only three victories to tie the late Joe Cipriano on the school's all-time list.

Cipriano's teams won 253 games in 17 seasons.

PACIFIC GAME HOMECOMING FOR FOUR PLAYERS

The Pacific game was a homecoming for four Tiger players from Nebraska: Mike Preston (Omaha), Mike Hahn (Lincoln), Tom Cockle (Raymond) and Dan Masters (Plattsmouth).

Nee said he scheduled Pacific, in part, because "it was just the right thing to do. I wasn't going to deny Nebraska kids coming back to Nebraska just because we might lose," he said.

Also, Pacific agreed to a two-for-one arrangement.

The Tigers will play in Lincoln again in the Ameritas Classic next season and Nebraska will play at Pacific on the way back from the Hawaii Rainbow Classic the season after that.

CENTER FRIEND NAMED 'ROOKIE OF THE WEEK'

Kimani Ffriend was the Big 12 "Rookie of the Week" for his play in victories against Oral Roberts (80-65) and Minnesota (90-78) at the Sports Center. He scored 33 points, pulled down 28 rebounds and blocked six shots in the two games. He hit 12-of-17 free throws against Minnesota.

Ffriend, a junior college transfer who has had the unenviable task of replacing Big 12 "Player of the Year" Venson Hamilton, blocked 43 shots in the 13 non-conference games. He was on pace to break the school single-season record of 91 blocks, set by Derrick Chandler in 1991-92.

BRIEFLY NOTED

— The Cornhuskers pulled down 60 rebounds in the Oral Roberts victory. It was the first time since Dec. 4, 1992, that Nebraska had grabbed 60 or more rebounds in a game.

Ffriend led the way with 21, a Sports Center and Big 12 single-game record. Nebraska out-rebounded eight of 13 non-conference opponents.

— Larry Florence scored 12 points against Pacific to pass 1,000 for his career. The senior forward and co-captain from Phenix City, Ala., became the 22nd Cornhusker to reach that total.

— Coach Paul Sanderford's Husker women were a disappointing 6-5 in non-conference play.

— Junior guard Melody Peterson, a transfer from Stanford University, was reinstated by the NCAA and played her first game at Nebraska in a 78-74 loss against Alabama-Birmingham in the opening game of the St. Peter's Holiday Classic at Jersey City, N.J., in late December.

Peterson scored 12 points in the game.

It appeared she would be forced to sit out this season, but the NCAA's Administrative Review Subcommittee granted her request to be immediately eligible on Dec. 21.

The official letter of reinstatement was received on Dec. 23.

The 5-foot-9 Peterson played in 27 games at Stanford in 1997-98, averaging 7.4 points and 2.7 rebounds. She played in 23 games for the Cardinal as a freshman in 1996-97. She already has earned a bachelor's degree in political science and African-American studies at Stanford.

— Senior guard Nicole Kubik just missed a triple-double in the Huskers' 89-86 victory against Washington, finishing with 23 points, 10 assists and nine steals.

— Sanderford's players became road warriors at the end of the non-conference schedule. Their last four games were on the road. They played at Wyoming, traveled across country for two games in Jersey City, N.J., and then headed back west to play at Cal-Santa Barbara. ■



Scott Bruhn

Junior point guard Danny Walker, a junior college transfer, has established himself as Nebraska's top three-point threat. He hit 29-of-69 shots from three-point range during non-conference play. Sophomore Cary Cochran struggled in three-point shooting, hitting only 19-of-70 in the first 13 games.

the non-conference season, and hit a couple of three-pointers to boot.

His shooting has shown marked improvement since last season, when he hit only 38.6 percent of his field goal attempts and averaged 3.3 points — averaging 12.4 minutes per game.

Those statistics didn't reflect what he had in mind for his first collegiate season.

He played four years on the varsity at Houston's Charles Milby High School and ranked among the state's top 100 recruits, earning all-district and all-region honors as a senior.

He expected to pick up right where he left off when he arrived at Nebraska.

"I thought it was going to be easy coming in as a freshman," Truscott said. "I had my hopes up high, thinking I was going to come in and domi-

nate the league. I really thought so.

"But everything happened so fast I found myself lost at times. In high school I was basically more athletic than my opponents, so I was able to go out and just play.

"In college you've got to be ready mentally."

The mental preparedness was even more important when Big 12 Conference play began.

"It was like a whole different level for me mentally and physically," he said.

By season's end, he felt more comfortable. The last four games "were my best," said Truscott, who realized by then "since I wasn't going to dominate, I was just going to have to come off the bench and help the team any way I could, picking up loose balls and doing a little scoring."

He scored what was then a career-high 12 points and grabbed seven rebounds in the Cornhuskers' 69-50 victory against Texas Tech at Big 12 Tournament at Kansas City, Mo.

Truscott had help dealing with the frustrations of his first collegiate season and the demands of being a student and far from home. His wife Linda and his daughter Janiah Chinwe, who is now a year and a half old, accompanied him to Lincoln. "It helped having them here," he said.

"I think they're my biggest fans. They support me when I'm going bad."

Linda and Janiah are regulars at games at the Devaney Sports Center.

Janiah might be playing there for Coach Paul Sanderford some day.

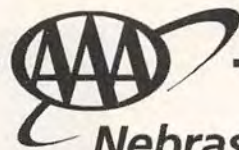
Louis got her a mini basketball, and "she's got a little goal," he said. "She's throwing it through the rim, learning how to dunk. I know she'll be tall. Hopefully, she'll be a basketball player."

Janiah "catches on quick to a lot of things," he said.

So does her father, who has improved significantly in all areas since last season.

He came off the bench to score 10 points in the Cornhuskers' final non-conference game, a 92-66 victory against Pacific at the Sports Center. He was 4-for-8 from the field, including 1-for-1 from three-point range, and he pulled down four rebounds in 18 minutes of action.

"I feel I'm 100 percent," he said afterward. "I've been running and jumping, doing my usual things. It (the knee) hasn't been giving me any problems. So I'm pretty much back." ■



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SIDEOUT

BIG

Shoes to Fill

*Pettit's replacement
always thought he'd
be back at Nebraska*

By Todd Henrichs

John Cook is a West Coast guy with Midwest values.

How else could you explain Cook's obsession with someday leading the Nebraska volleyball program? Cook cut his coaching teeth not far from the beaches of San Diego, a hot bed for top talent far from the chilling winter temperatures of Lincoln.

Surely, there were coaching opportunities away from the Snow Belt. Just not any that approached the importance of coaching at the University of Nebraska.

"I coached here from 1988 through 1990, and there was something inside me that always thought I'd be back here someday," Cook said on the day he replaced NU coaching legend Terry Pettit. "This is a dream come true for me."

The much-anticipated handoff happened last month when Pettit stepped down after 23 seasons. Cook was Pettit's hand-picked successor.

Cook, 43, spent this past season as associate head coach at NU, soaking up the traditions of Husker volleyball and every morsel of knowledge he could glean from Pettit in their final season together on the bench.

Cook said he's confident, but knows there are big shoes to fill. Although the coaching change has been planned for months, he said its magnitude didn't set in until the



John Cook compiled a 161-73 overall mark in seven seasons at Wisconsin before returning to Nebraska as associate head coach.

Nebraska program celebrated its 25th anniversary in November.

More than 8,000 were at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, a crowd that included many of Nebraska's former All-Americans.

"After Terry got up and talked and I saw those alumni out there, it just hit me like a thunderbolt," Cook said. "I thought, 'Boy, this is much bigger than I ever imagined.' 'When they were reading off all the accom-

plishments, I felt a little bit overwhelmed."

Pettit, however, said few are qualified to assume what he called the best coaching job in collegiate volleyball today. Close friends, Pettit knew Cook possessed the qualities needed to succeed at Nebraska.

"John grinds away until he gets it right," Pettit said. "As a head coach, if you want to have a successful program, you have to battle."

"We needed to have somebody who had already been successful, had already developed a program."

Cook did that at Wisconsin, his first major head-coaching assignment. In seven years there, far, far from the California coast, Cook twice directed the within a win of the final four. He compiled a 161-73 overall mark and won a Big 10 Conference championship.

Big 12 champ Nebraska finished 27-6 this past season, and if All-American Nancy Meendering doesn't redshirt to play with the U.S. Olympic team, the Huskers will have seven of their top eight players back next year.

Before handing over the job, Pettit told Cook there's more talent returning than ever before in NU's program. Husker players supported Cook, saying his appointment means little will change at Nebraska.

Cook's coaching strengths are centered on defense, an area where Nebraska has struggled at times against the very best teams. Much of his philosophy is based on intensive strength and conditioning training.

"Coach Cook has a lot of energy," outgoing senior Mandy Monson said. "He will not only maintain the program but he will make it better so that Nebraska can contend for national championships for years to come."

Cook, who earned a bronze medal coaching with the 1992 U.S. men's Olympic team, has championship experience. He led Francis Park High School in San Diego to two state championships in a coaching stint from 1981-88. During that time, he also served as top assistant at California-San Diego, an NCAA Division III school which won the 1984 national title.

Cook earned degrees from San Diego and San Diego State, where wife Wendy was an All-American setter. They are parents to two young children, daughter Lauren and son Taylor.

Family is important to Cook, just as it is to Pettit. With a young daugh-

ter at home and another playing volleyball at Colorado State, Pettit resigned in order to spend more quality time with them and wife Anne.

Pettit made volleyball his full-time passion as coach, not only turning Nebraska into a top collegiate program but also adding his influence to the game at the national, high school and club level.

Nebraska alone has more than 40 high school products spread throughout the country at NCAA Division I programs. Cook said one of his most important jobs is to continue the tradition where young girls in the state aspire to become Huskers.

Pettit, 53, will turn his attention to

an administrative position created by athletic director Bill Byrne. Pettit will be available as a sounding board for all coaches on the Nebraska staff.

Pettit says he will be at the volleyball matches as well, watching his former team and watching Cook on the sideline. He said bringing Cook back to Nebraska was his most important recruit.

And while some coaches might be intimidated with Pettit looking over their shoulder, Cook said he wouldn't have it any other way.

"He's such a close friend and such an important part of my life, I just think it will be great to have him around," Cook said. "The thing that attracted me is he's going to be one of my coaching mentors." ■



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ON THE ATTACK

Husker junior Vering returns to aggressive style that made him a high school legend

By Steve Sipple

Brad Vering is a Nebraska high school legend, one of the best wrestlers the state has ever produced.

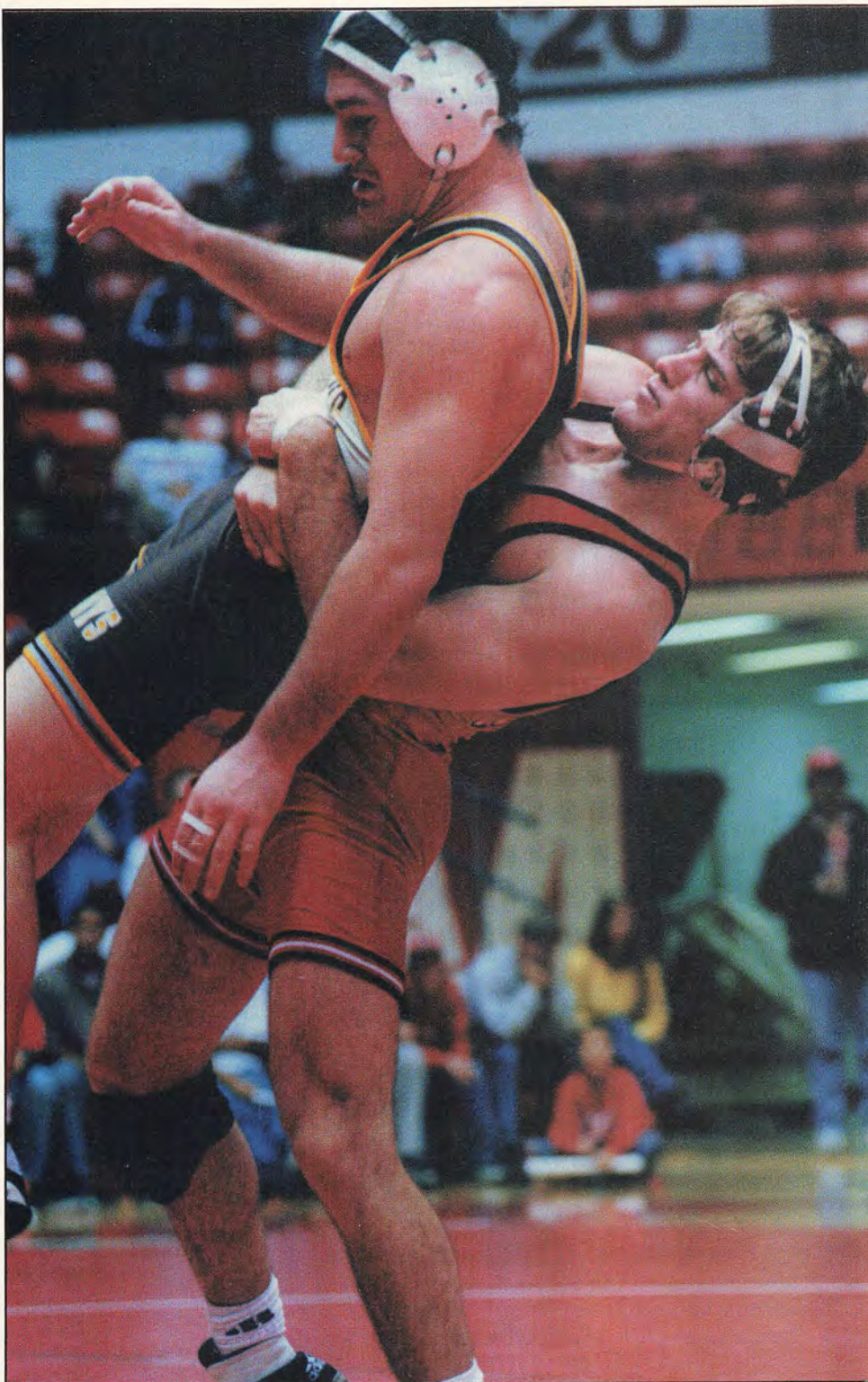
The Howells native captured three state championships and finished his prep career 148-2. He won Junior National Greco-Roman titles in 1995 and 1996, earning Outstanding Wrestler honors in 1996. He also won the Junior National freestyle championship in 1996.

But during his first two collegiate seasons at Nebraska, Vering says, he wrestled "well enough to get by."

By his lofty standards, that's not nearly enough.

"But I feel I'm wrestling now kind of like I did in my last few years of high school," he said. "Back then I was going out and really shooting on people more. I was a lot more aggressive. The last couple years, I haven't really attacked like I wanted."

"Now I'm really hungry. I'm



Nebraska 197-pounder Brad Vering started the second semester with a 16-1 record and No. 3 national ranking.

starting to figure out the whole college game."

The improved version of Vering took a 16-1 record and No. 3 national ranking into Nebraska's second-semester sprint toward the March 16-18 NCAA championships in St. Louis. The 197-pound junior generated a truckload of confidence by

winning the prestigious Midlands Tournament Dec. 30 in Evanston, Ill.

The last Nebraska wrestler to capture the Midlands event was Bill Scherr in 1984. Scherr went on to win the 190-pound NCAA title that year.

Cornhusker Coach Tim Neumann believes Vering can repeat Scherr's

path. More important, so does Vering.

"Brad doesn't just say he expects to win — he believes in his heart and soul he'll win the rest of his matches," Neumann said.

Said Vering: "It seems like last year when I'd wrestle guys in the top 20, I was just trying to get by. Now I'm trying to put them away, making it so they don't want to wrestle me again.

"I just want to wrestle well enough that nobody will want to draw me at the national tournament. That's my goal. I want to put that fear into everybody."

Vering already has made it clear he'll be among the favorites in his weight class at the NCAA meet. Entering a Jan. 7 dual at Minnesota, he led the team with six pins and owned victories against seven wrestlers who were ranked at the time he faced them, including an 8-0 triumph against No. 5 Pat Quirk of Illinois in the Midlands' championship match.

Vering suffered his only loss Dec. 19 in the finals of the Reno (Nev.) Challenge, surrendering a takedown

in the final 10 seconds of a 3-2 setback against second-ranked Mark Munoz of Oklahoma State.

Vering felt he wrestled Munoz well enough to beat him. Vering spent most of the match moving forward, Munoz backward. Vering came close to scoring a couple take-downs. In the final moments of the match, Vering was in a defensive mode. He relaxed for a second, and Munoz used an inside trip to take him down.

Immediately afterward, Vering, still in his wrestling boots, ran two miles to the team hotel, where he needed time to think.

"The sooner you can get over a loss like that, the better off you are," he said. "I was pretty pumped up. I ran through some weird neighborhoods, but I didn't even think about it. It was just my way of blowing off steam and pushing away the loss as quickly as I could."

As a 177-pound freshman in 1997-98, Vering finished 33-9 and failed to place at the NCAA meet. Last season he finished 26-9 at 184 after winding up fourth at nationals.

Those would be regarded as

strong seasons by most underclassmen. But Vering had higher expectations coming out of high school.

"I wanted to be a four-time national champion. That was one of my goals," Vering said. "I really felt I could do that.

"I had a good year as a freshman; I just didn't have a good national tournament. It was really frustrating. I spent the whole year after that tournament really concentrating on (the next NCAA meet).

"But then my sophomore year wasn't as good as I expected it to be. I hurt my knee a little, and it slowed me down."

Vering, however, made a strong season-ending run last year, finishing runner-up in the Big 12 at 184 pounds behind budding Iowa State legend Cael Sanderson, who went on to capture the NCAA crown as a freshman. Vering earned All-American status with his fourth-place finish at nationals.

"I kind of got in a slump at the beginning of last year, but I feel great right now," Vering said. "And I don't feel like I've really turned it on yet." ■

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Humor Can Be Helpful

California recruit 'has a little fun' in announcing commitment to NU

By James Hale

Sometimes things are so intense in recruiting, it is good to have a sense of humor. We don't always look at it that way, but when you think about things for a minute, a sense of humor is a must during the hectic time of recruiting.

Nebraska Coach Frank Solich had his sense of humor tested recently, when the Cornhuskers

Nebraska Commitments for 2000

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Willie Amos	Sweetwater, Texas	6-1	180	RB/WR
Jake Andersen	Denver (Mullen)	6-2	305	OL
Manaia Brown	Granger, Utah	6-4	280	DL
Terrell Butler	Austell (Pebblebrook), Ga.	5-10	190	CB/WR
Thunder Collins	Los Angeles (East L.A. College)	6-2	210	IB
Ira Cooper	Omaha (Westside), Neb.	6-1 1/2	220	LB
Sandro DeAngelis	Buffalo, N.Y. (St. Joseph Coll.)	5-9	195	FB/K
Mike Erickson	Papillion (Papillion-LaVista), Neb.	6-4	260	OL
Martin Flaum	Denver (Northglenn), Colo.	6-5	280	OL
T.J. Hollowell	Copperas Cove, Texas	6-1	220	LB
Lanny Hopkins	Rowlett, Texas	6-2	185	LB
Steve Kriewald	North Loup-Scotia	5-11	250	FB
DeWayne Long Jr.	West Des Moines (Dowling) Iowa	6-1	205	RB
Lornell McPherson	Omaha (Central), Neb.	5-11	175	DB/WB
Ross Pilkington	Loveland, Colo.	6-1	175	WR
Nick Povendo	Keller, Texas	6-5	285	OG
Jason Richenberger	Liberty, Mo.	6-3	210	LB
Chris Septak	Millard (West), Neb.	6-4	235	TE
Bernard Thomas	Mountain View (St. Francis), Calif.	6-4	235	LB/RE
Ben Zajicek	Beatrice, Neb.	6-1	205	WR/DB

picked up their 15th commitment of the 2000 class. Bernard Thomas (6-foot-4, 235 pounds, with 4.6 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Mountain View (St. Francis), Calif., is an outside linebacker/defensive end with tremendous ability and a

tremendous sense of humor.

"I guess I had Coach Solich going for a moment when I committed to them," Thomas said with a laugh. "I knew that I wanted to go to Nebraska even on my trip to USC. So, as soon as I got back from that

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trip I called Coach Solich, and I told him that I had committed. Of course, I had to let the thought hang there for a little bit to get him wondering if I had committed to USC. Then, I jumped in and said that I had committed to Nebraska.

"I am a little bit of a prankster, and I wanted to have a little bit of fun with the whole thing. Coach Solich had a laugh and he didn't seem to mind too much."

Once Solich got over the initial disappointment, we can assume that he was ecstatic to land one of the top players out of California. Thomas was a do-everything guy at St. Francis, playing middle linebacker, nose guard, defensive end, defensive tackle and fullback.

Despite teams trying to avoid Thomas at all costs, he still made close to 100 tackle, had six sacks, 12 tackles for losses, three fumble recoveries and two forced fumbles. Just think of the numbers Thomas could have posted if teams didn't run away from him 75 percent of the time.

Thomas isn't a bad fullback either, rushing for 430 yards at 7.2 yards per carry and catching four passes for another 100 yards.

Thomas admits that his visit to Lincoln Dec. 10 sewed things up for him.

"I just fit in with the players so well that I knew almost immediately that Nebraska was going to be the place for me," Thomas said.

"I really fit in with Carlos Polk, who was my host, and guys like Joe Walker, Eric Johnson and Wilson Thomas showed me a real good time. They made me feel as if I was already part of the team. I could tell that they really cared about me and that it was genuine. They were honest with me about their school, and that is what I wanted to hear."

Thomas will play in the California/Texas high school all-star game this summer. The Huskers recruited him as a rush end.

Nebraska recently received five other commitments, including Texas top 100-linebacker talent T.J. Hollowell (6-2, 215, 4.6) of Copperas Cove, Texas. Hollowell is the teammate of the celebrated Vontez Duff who committed to Notre Dame. However, Hollowell doesn't take a back seat to anyone, and that includes Duff. Hollowell had a great visit to Nebraska Dec. 10 and chose the Huskers over Texas A&M and Oklahoma.

Longhorns Again Build Top Class

As we head down the home stretch of the 2000 recruiting season, let's take a look at each Big 12 team.

Nebraska will have one of the top ten classes in the country. Offensive lineman Martin Flaum of Denver (Northglenn), Colo., tight end Chris Septak of Omaha (Millard West), Neb., and linebacker Ira Cooper of Omaha (Westside) highlight the Cornhusker commitments.

Texas may have the top class in the country with its 14 commitments. Certainly, the Longhorns have put together the top group of defensive linemen in Sonny Davis of Austin (Lanier), Texas, Steve Lee of Shreveport (Evangel), La., Marcel Moses of Texas City, Texas, and Adam Dorion of Duncan, Okla.

Colorado's recruiting picked up steam in December, as the Buffs now have 15 commitments. Quarterback Craig Ochs of Boulder (Fairview), Colo., is considered one of the nation's best, and linebacker Sean Tufts of Englewood (Cherry Creek), Colo., is as well. However, Tufts will be coming off ACL surgery.

Oklahoma had 12 oral commitments and two junior college signees at press time. The Sooners signed junior college All-America offensive lineman Howard Duncan of Butler (Kan.) Community College and pass rushing defensive end Marcus Chretien of Navarro (Texas) JC. Offensive line commitment Wes Sims of Weatherford, Okla., is regarded as a first team All-American.

Texas A&M is off to a slow start, but it is putting together one of the top defensive back classes in the country. Cornerback Dawon Gentry of Denison, Texas, is a recent commitment who rushed for more than 1,800 yards as a tailback this past year. Cornerback Jonte Buhl of Pflugerville (Connally), Texas, and free safety Adam Black of Houston (Cy Falls) are top-100 Texas talents, with Black drawing national attention.

Missouri has been on a roll lately, picking up oral commitments from defensive tackle Micah Minshall of Olathe (North), Kan., and quarterback Cody Buford of Raytown (South), Mo.

Oklahoma State fans are going crazy over the commitment of blue chip running back Tatum Bell of DeSoto, Texas. Bell is ranked as one of the top five running backs in the country and a top-10 talent in Texas. The Cowboys also have a commitment from highly touted cover corner Corey Alexander of Houston (Forrest Brook).

At Kansas, the Jayhawks have 11 commitments, headed by wide receiver Jonathan Thompson of Kilgore, Texas, and place-kicker Chris Tyrell of Liberty, Kan.

Kansas State has four known commitments, but running back Josh Scobey of Northeastern (Okla.) A&M JC is one of the top junior college running backs in the nation.

Iowa State had eight commitments at press time, beating Nebraska on Ja'Maine Billups of Omaha (Central) has given their ailing program a boost. Linebacker Brett Kellogg of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is highly thought of as well.

Baylor had six oral commitments, led by running back Jonathan Golden of Sugar Land (Clements), Texas.

New Texas Tech Coach Mike Leach got a late start, and the Red Raiders had no commitments at press time. However, the former University of Oklahoma offensive coordinator brings a great offensive reputation to Lubbock and already he has peaked the interest of the nation's top receiver — Roy Williams of Odessa (Permian), Texas. Williams was thought to be leaning toward Texas, but now the local boy may stay home. ■

Linebacker Lanny Hopkins (6-3, 185, 4.5) of Rowlett, Texas, chose Nebraska over Texas A&M, Memphis and Oklahoma, and running back Willie Amos of Sweetwater, Texas, picked the Huskers over Texas Christian. Amos rushed 188 times for 1,400 yards and 15 touchdowns but is likely to play receiver at Nebraska.

Nebraska also dipped into the State of Georgia to get a commitment from speedster Terrell Butler, a 5-10, 190-pound cornerback/wide receiver from Austell (Pebblebrook) and Utah for defensive lineman Manaia Brown, a 6-4, 280-pounder from Granger.

The Huskers apparently had yet another linebacker in Aurmon Satchell (6-2, 205, 4.55) of Denver (Jefferson). Satchell committed to Nebraska but later changed his mind and committed to Texas.

It has always been apparent that Nebraska was waiting and scouting around the country trying to find the quarterbacks that would be just right for their multiple-option offense. Thanks to recent visits, it looks like they have their eyes on at

least two quarterbacks and will get a shot at one more in January.

Corey Webster (6-1, 180, 4.55) of St. Francis, La., is a three-year starter who visited in December. Running the Wing-T, Webster threw for 1,581 yards and 23 touchdowns, while rushing for 197 yards this past season.

"I really liked my trip to Nebraska," Webster said. "I can really see myself playing for Nebraska someday, but I am still going to look around a little bit. I have already been to Baylor and liked Nebraska a lot more than them. I am going to visit Tulane and Southern Mississippi in January, and then I will decide. I would say Nebraska is my leader right now."

Chris Kelly (6-2, 205, 4.7) of Germantown (Seneca Valley), Md., was having a tough time deciding between Nebraska and Maryland after his visit to Nebraska in December. Kelly went to the visit on a high, after quarterbacking Seneca to a state championship and 13-0 record. Kelly completed 80 of 115 passes, for 1,389 yards and 22

touchdowns, with only three interceptions.

Kelly loved his visit to Nebraska, but Maryland is the home school, and the two are nip-and-tuck.

"I just really have to sit down and decide what is really best for me," Kelly said. "Maryland is a program that is getting better and better all the time, and it is close to home so all my family and friends could see me play. Nebraska is one of the top college football programs in the country, and they don't have a lot of quarterback depth. The situation really couldn't be any better for me to go to a program like Nebraska."

I have a lot of things to think over, but I have a couple of weeks to put things together."

The Cornhuskers will get their chance at Carlyle Holiday (6-3, 185, 4.5) of San Antonio (Roosevelt) in January. Holiday is the No. 1 quarterback recruit for Texas A&M, while Notre Dame and Syracuse have offered him as well.

"I really like Texas A&M, but I owe it to myself to see what a great program like Nebraska is all about," Holiday said. "I haven't committed anywhere yet, and I am still trying to figure out which is the best college for me. After I go to Nebraska, I will know where I want to go."

The Cornhuskers have lost out on a couple of players they really wanted. Free Safety Marvyn Godbolt (6-2, 175, 4.5) of San Antonio (Taft) shocked many when he committed to Texas Christian over Nebraska, Texas A&M and Kansas. Running back Ja'Maine Billups (6-0, 195, 4.5) of Omaha (Central)'s selection of Iowa State was even more shocking to Husker fans. Ironically, as a former Nebraska player helped steer him away.

"Coach (Mike) Grant was a big reason why I chose Iowa State," Billups said.

"It's hard to leave Nebraska, especially when so many of my family and friends are Nebraska fans, but Coach Grant assured me that I would get to play running back, while Nebraska really wanted me as a defensive back. I want to play running back, and Iowa State has always had a good tailback. I just feel that Iowa State is a good situation for me."


Running back Albert Hollis of Sacramento (Christian Brothers), Calif., has eliminated Nebraska. ■

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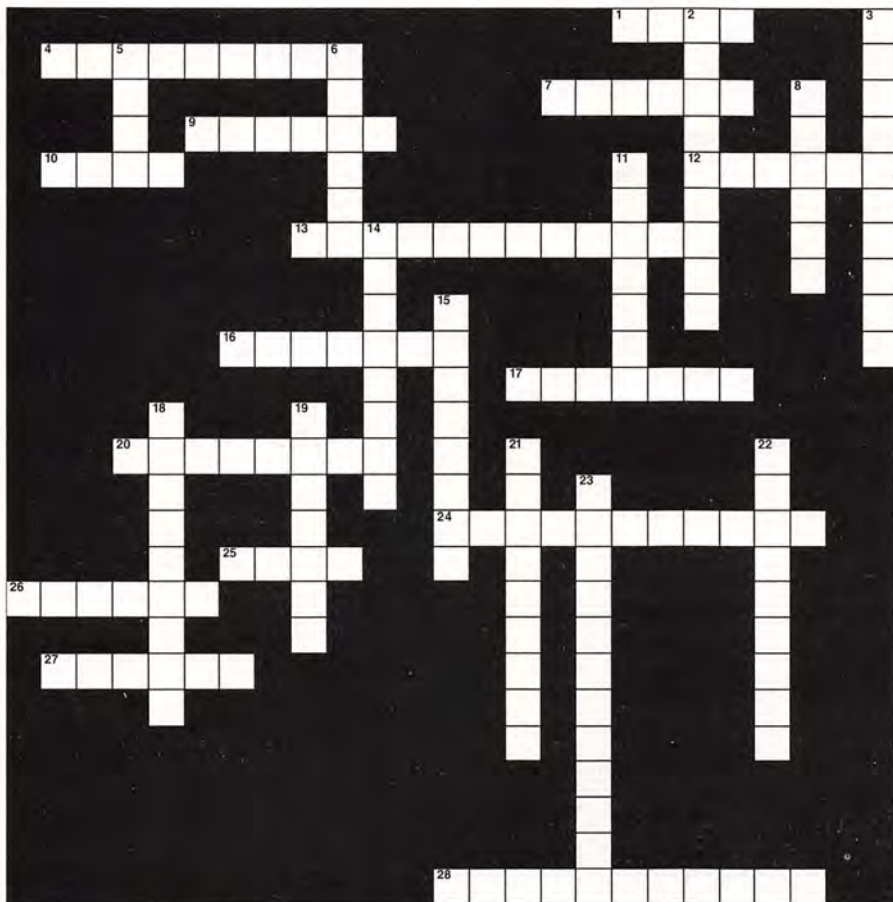
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- 27 NU tackle granted extra year
- 28 Blocked 3 field goals in 1999

DOWN

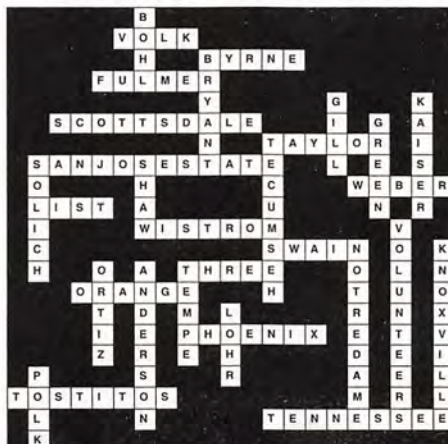
- 2 All-Big 12 guard
- 3 Started 51 consecutive games

Note

All or part of three answers for the Dec. 4 puzzle solution were missing in the January issue. Those answers were (26 across) Darlington, (20 down) Hadenfeldt and (24 down) Humm.

- 5 NU quarterback coach
 - 6 NU's No. 34
 - 8 NU's No. 54
 - 11 Career total offense leader
 - 14 Won 3 national titles in 1990s
 - 15 Returned punt for TD in Fiesta Bowl
 - 18 Fiesta Bowl MVP
 - 19 All-Big 12 tight end
 - 21 2000 road opener
 - 22 Leading rusher in Fiesta Bowl
 - 23 1999 national champion
- Answers in March issue

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Stepping Aside Didn't Get Any Easier

McBride says the players probably meant as much to him as the game itself



Mike BABCOCK

THE STORY WAS that Charlie McBride told Tom Osborne he was thinking seriously of retiring as the Nebraska football team's defensive coordinator following the 1997 season.

Osborne told McBride he couldn't because he, Osborne, planned to retire.

As it turns out, the story was accurate, although Osborne didn't tell McBride he couldn't step aside. Rather, he asked "if I would stay and help Frank (Solich),"

McBride said.

Solich was succeeding Osborne as head coach, and Osborne wanted as little disruption of the staff as possible. "I didn't even second-guess that because I figured it was important," McBride said in a corner of the lobby of the Scottsdale Plaza Resort on the morning after the Fiesta Bowl game.

"I mean, Nebraska means something to me."

No one could question that. No one could question his commitment to the program he has served so well for 23 years, the last 18 as defensive coordinator and defensive line coach.

McBride also thought seriously about retiring after last season. But senior rover Mike Brown persuaded him to stay. Brown "came and said: 'Coach, can you just stay until I go?'"

So he reconsidered his retirement again. "This was a pretty meaningful group," McBride explained. "I could see they were something special, and I wanted to be a part of that."

"We didn't win the national championship. But just being part of their group was probably as great of a year as I've ever spent coaching. I've had as much fun coaching players as I've ever had."

The truth is, McBride said the same thing after nearly every season. Each was the best. You would be hard-pressed to identify a group of players that didn't earn a special place in his heart.

His reflection on his coaching career was more a listing of names of those who played for him than a recounting of victories. "I think he's got tremendous love for the game," Solich said.

"And he really loves his players. He used that word, and I think it's accurate."

The 60-year-old McBride came to consider himself a players' coach.

"The players probably meant as much to me as the game itself," he said.

His first group of defensive linemen, among them Kerry Weinmaster, Rod Horn, Bill Barnett, Oudious Lee, Dan Pensick and David Clark, was "something special," he said. "We're all very close friends to this day, all of us."

"Being the first group, there were probably times when I

was really hard on them. But you go all the way from that first group I had back to this last group I had, it almost seems the same."

McBride would continue coaching if he could. "But I think he just felt like he was worn out a little bit, like he couldn't do some of the things he used to do," said Solich.

"I tried to talk him out of it, briefly. I talked to him as late as maybe three or four days ago about: Are you sure this is what you want to do? And he confirmed it again."

The decision was based on health considerations and family.

"The family thing is important," McBride said.

He declined to elaborate on the physical ailments, which include a severe back problem, "because it's a private thing," he said. "But the physical part of it was starting to become demanding."

That prompted him to approach Osborne about retiring after the 1997 season.

"I fought through a lot of things," said McBride. "And they have not ceased."

In marked contrast to his sometimes-gruff exterior, he couldn't hide the emotional fallout of telling his players he was stepping aside. Though he seemed relaxed the morning after the game, and comfortable with his decision, he occasionally paused to compose himself as his voice began to crack.

That was the case when he talked about junior defensive tackle Loran Kaiser, who in many ways is the definitive McBride player. "Loran felt abandoned going into his senior season," said McBride.

"I had a coach that got fired when I was a freshman, (the coach) that recruited me. I wanted to quit. I wanted to go to another school. So I know how he (Kaiser) felt. He felt like I betrayed him."

"We talked. The conversation was tough for both of us. But I think he understands."

If it hadn't been Kaiser this season, it would have been another player next season.

"Next year it would be Jeremy (Slechta) and Jason Lohr," McBride said. "The next year, it would be Patrick (Kabongo) and Junior (Tagoa'i). And it's not only those kids, it's all of them."

In that sense, there would be no right time to retire.

While McBride talked with reporters, his wife Debbie approached, carrying a box in which there was a long-stem red rose. "Debbie, did you get a rose?" he asked.

"You did, too," she said.

"I got a rose?" he said with surprise.

John Reinhardt, who played for McBride in the mid-1980s, had sent the roses.

"Those are the things that mean a lot," McBride said.

The emotion began surfacing again, softening the lines in a face that occasionally bore a stern countenance from the point of view of players and reporters alike. ■



Charlie McBride was defensive coordinator for 18 years.

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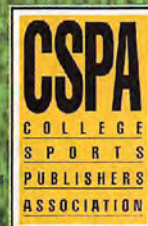
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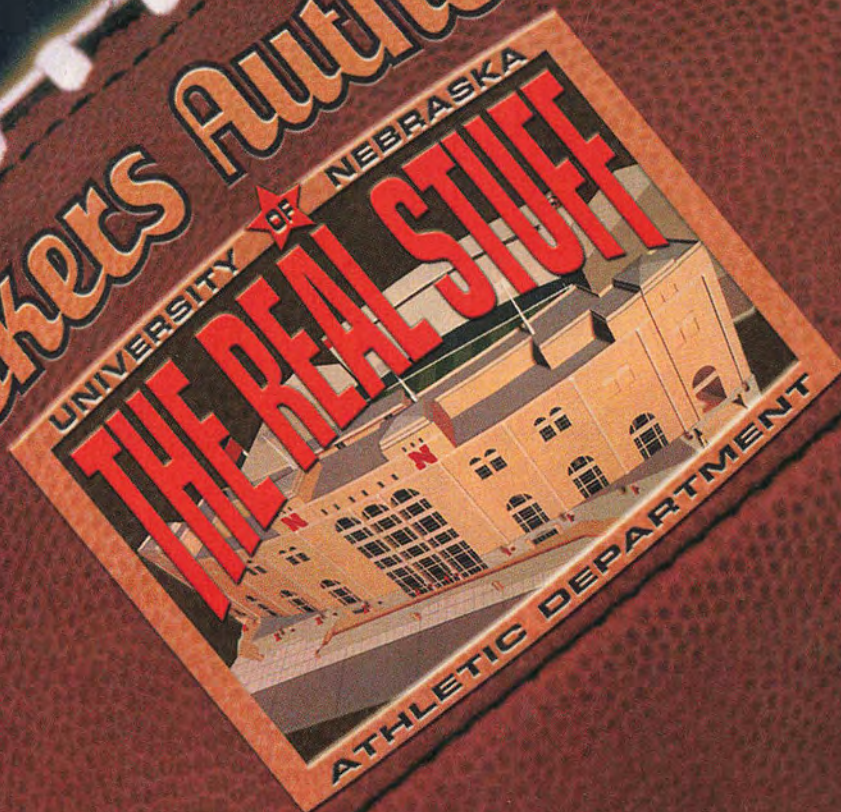
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